

# *After the Ball*

*By JAMES COLWELL*



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AFTER THE BALL

A RENCO PRODUCTION

"Mr. Tom!" Eve demanded, "why haven't you any little  
babies of your own?"

—See Page 294

# AFTER THE BALL

BY JAMES COLWELL ✓

*A Romance of Youth Today ✓*

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✓  
ILLUSTRATED

*with scenes from the photoplay*

**"AFTER THE BALL"**

*as produced by*

**RENCO FILM COMPANY**

*From the widely popular song-story of the same name*

*by Charles K. Harris ✓*

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Published by  
*The TIMES-MIRROR Press*  
Los Angeles, California

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A F T E R   T H E   B A L L

PRODUCED BY  
RENCO FILM COMPANY

DIRECTED BY  
DALLAS M. FITZGERALD

SCENARIO BY  
JAMES COLWELL

Adapted from the famous song-story by  
CHARLES K. HARRIS

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CAST:

LORRAINE TREVELYAN . . . . .	<i>Miriam Cooper</i>
ARTHUR TREVELYAN . . . . .	<i>Gaston Glass</i>
GILDA GAY . . . . .	<i>Edna Murphy</i>
TOM STEVENS . . . . .	<i>Robert Frazier</i>



# AFTER THE BALL

## CHAPTER I

AS THE DOOR of the dance hall swung open, the harmonies erupted by Nigger Joe's Jazz Orchestra echoed through the street.

Weird wailings from the tenor saxophone crashed against the nearby windows, that stared back at the resort with sophisticated familiarity. Lulling the other players into a diminuendo of a minor melody, the clarinetist crooned a nocturne of the Congo, to be halted unheard under the cacophony of sound.

Now the artist at the drums and traps had come into his frenzied own. Cat-calls; the skirl of a fife; the blood-throb of the banjo-thumper, all mingled in a pulsing, primitive rhythm which reverted alluringly to a jungle night and the beat of a tom-tom; while faintly distinct, as of an undertone, came the shuffle of the dancing feet moving faster, faster—

The street, hidden away in a part of Los Angeles untouched by the city's mushroom growth, turned an aloof shoulder to the revelry in Nigger Joe's. Its dark warehouses were uncompromising in their gloom, while a few dimly lit lodging-houses were in forlorn contrast to the gayety of the dance-hall. They were too accustomed to the frivolities of the resort's patrons, to be aroused now by the arrival of a taxicab which disgorged its passengers before the door of Nigger Joe's.

Thump on your tom-tom, Ethiop. Give that slide trombone man more elbow room. Rattle your castanets, at the drums and traps. Strut your berries, dancers, and smile with your teeth, Nigger Joe. . . . Here comes new money!

First to emerge from the cab was young Arthur Trevelyan, son of the retired oil capitalist whose name on the Coast was synonymous with the first great expansion of the California petroleum industry.

The youth, still in his verdant early twenties, revealed to those who had opportunity to compare the two, many of the characteristics which had made Old Man Mark Trevelyan dominant in his world. There was the same dash; the same disregard of obstacles and difficulties was apparent in his actions; the easy ability, by means of an attractive smile and a personality which commanded affection, to win the friendship of those with whom he came in contact, were Arthur Trevelyan's equally as they were his father's.

But where the traits which the boy had inherited had been tempered in the father with a balance and a determination of purpose directed always to the practical goal of achievement, in the boy these same energies had been diverted aimlessly to the pursuit of good times, and the enjoyment of the luxuries that stirred his senses. The same smile which had done much to win millions for the father, was too ready to win companions for Arthur who were willing to acquiesce in anything he suggested, so long as they helped him spend his money.

Of the laughing, flirtatious, frolicking group to whom Arthur, as usual, was playing host, there was one whose interest went deeper and farther than in his capacity as a provider of riotous entertainment. And now, as he turned from consultation of the taximeter to help her from the car to the sidewalk, it was apparent that the girl's concern was more in him than in the fact that he was Old Man Trevelyan's son.

Gilda Gay was a show-girl gone into the movies. Her press notices told that she had won instant recognition in her screen career, as soon as she had been discovered by her ubiquitous director, who had persuaded her parents to allow her to leave her convent and become famous via the silver-sheet. Part of these statements were true. It was correct that she had been in a convent; but her biographers had neglected to state that the institution had been a haven for parentless waifs, and that Gilda had broken away from parochial control, in response to an indefinite ambitious urge. The press agents had neglected also to mention that her climb to fame had led her first to cabaret, then to the chorus, next a brief period with a real Broadway opening, when her dreams seemed about to be realized, then to a road show, and last, to Los Angeles, where, the road show disbanding, it was she who had done the persuading, and had begun motion picture work by intermittent and uncertain employment as an "extra."

Gilda, naturally, was pretty. A cameraman had told her not untruly that she "screened like a million dollars." There was an ethereal quality to

her natural blondness, which was particularly appealing when contrasted with calico and homespun in the "westerns" for which she usually had been engaged.

But what the camera lens had failed to depict, and what Arthur Trevelyan recently had begun to realize, was that the chief ingredient of Gilda's beauty was derived from the greater beauty of her soul—a fearless, clean-thought view-point of the world, which asked of it no favors but only the right to make her way in it without the compromise of guile—a personage whose inner self would have rejoiced the hearts of the Sisters who had sheltered her.

She paused now as Arthur, surrounded by his companions, started to lead the way into Nigger Joe's. Her deterring hand on his arm brought him to a stop.

"Please, dear, be careful. Not too much," she murmured, hoping to be unheard by the others.

But Dumplings Haniford, leaning on the arm of her escort, caught the remark.

"'Careful?' What do you mean, 'be careful'? Arthur's always careful, aren't you, Arthur? Never dropped a bottle yet, ever since he was a baby."

Her companion, Harry Maghan, an ineffectual, half-developed, prematurely old young man of twenty-eight or thirty, boomed in laughter at her sally.

"My, my, Dumplings—" and the street echoed with his words—"what a clever, clever child you are!"

Dumplings was flattered.

"Clever as a cleaver," she retorted. The group, which now had reached the entrance to the dance hall, repeated Harry's responding chortle. Then:

"Who's got the bottles?"

"Don't worry, old deah. Not a drop wasted."

"Still time for a dance—an' then we'll all go home."

"Home? Why speak of grief?"

"All right. Le's go!"

And through the doors, their edges discreetly padded to muffle the concatenation of jazz inside, passed young Arthur Trevelyan and his gang, the women with their cloaks carefully concealing their precious contraband burdens, the men with dinner coats bulging suspiciously over outlines which no one cared to question.

In the entresol Gilda paused again.

"Please, dear—remember the last time."

"Don't be a sill," Arthur replied sharply. Then as he noticed the fleeting expression of pain at her reaction to his words, he softened.

"It's all right, honey. I know just when to stop."

There was a glow of tenderness to his words which warmed Gilda. Grateful though she was, she realized that the phrase had been thrown more as a sop to her eagerness, rather than in acquiescence to her wishes, and her hand pressed his arm in a thankful gesture as they led the way into the dance hall.

Either through some unaccountable oversight, or possibly because of a more sinister police attitude,

the resort which Arthur and his gang had entered had remained a reversion to the type more frequent in the days of the Barbary Coast than in the post-prohibition era. Crowding the polished floor, packed so closely together that the more obvious dance evolutions were barred by their numbers, were scores of jostling, swaying devotees, in undulating response to the enticements of the barbaric chords. The room itself was devoid of adornment, and its only furniture was of practical and durable nature—bare tables, plain chairs, and glassware, guaranteed to withstand any usage except as of the missiles into which often they were turned.

Above the tables, which fringed three sides of the dance floor, extended a balcony which had been partitioned off into semi-closed booths to offer an illusion of privacy. This balcony Nigger Joe cunningly had contrived to serve as a double means of increasing his profits—first, by offering seclusion to those who found romance capable of blossoming even here—and principally to serve as a vantage point to those sight-seeing groups who found in such a resort opportunity to whet their appetite for the bizarre.

Over all—over the steaming, dance-frenzied throng on the floor—in little groups of twos and threes seated at the tables, and lingering under the frescoes of the balcony, was an indescribable mingled essence of stale drinks, tobacco smoke, face powder and cosmetics.

Now, delighted with themselves for having reached so colorful a spot in which to culminate their night's frolic, Trevelyan, Gilda, Dumplings

Haniford, Harry Maghan and the others hailed boisterously the tables to which Nigger Joe himself had brought them on the balcony. The party separated into groups, and flowed into the partitioned booths to the accompaniment of facetious references to the brass-plated private dining rooms, allusions to the regrettable lack of chaperons, elaborate ceremony in the proffering of flasks, and insistence on the virtues of each male individual's bootlegger.

Gilda and Arthur found themselves at the balcony rail. As she stood, fascinated, looking downward at the spectacle of the beetle-like bodies in turmoil on the dance floor, Arthur drew her aside behind the shelter of a half-drawn curtain.

"Just once," he pleaded.

Gilda was dismayed.

"Not here—not with all these people."

They hastily drew away as the waiter entered. His task was a simple one, for his list of viands was nil, and his beverages consisted of only two varieties, ginger ale and near-beer. The management, aware that its patrons brought "their own," was content to reap its profit in the exorbitant prices charged for the two commodities.

Arthur protested at the meagerness of the choice.

"Can't you fix us up with a little something? Want to save what I've got," he explained.

The waiter shook his head in automatic response to the incessant question of the day.

"Make it a beer, then," Arthur ordered, and then as a new distraction offered itself, he turned to Gilda.

"Listen! It's our favorite."

The orchestra had begun, crooningly, insinuatingly, a dance rhythm which would have amazed the pioneers of the ragtime period with which the cabaret craze had been born. Gone now were the blaring, blatant melodies, the simplified rhythms of the adolescent one-step and grotesque turkey trot. In their place had crept subtle insinuations of a music which hints things that stir subconsciously in quickened pulses, which whispers vague invitations that quicken the breath and part the lips—which brings the dancers cheek to cheek, with eyes half-closed gleaming into answering eyes—which sways bodies in unison to the glide and shuffle of tiny dance steps.

Thus now were Gilda and Arthur responding to the harmonies in the few feet of space between their table and the rail. Dancers below, their attention momentarily attracted from their own intricacies, smiled up in fellowship at the visitors from another sphere. . . . Slummy O'Grady and the Slumming Lady are sisters under the din.

In an adjoining booth Dumplings Haniford and Harry Maghan leaned perilously over the rail to peer at Gilda and Arthur. Separated by the partition, the two couples laughed with the fun of it all.

"Isn't it the Ritz?" cried Dumplings. "Got anything to drink? Harry's gone dry."

Arthur offered his flask, an ingenious contrivance of a battery of miniature bottles and nested cups, around the partition.

At that time the waiter returned. Gilda welcomed his arrival as an opportunity to divert Arthur from his more potent fluid.

"Let's try it, dear," she urged.

"Anything once," said Arthur, under the glow once more of being hospitable to his friends—but as he put the glass of innocuous brew to his lips, he grimaced and rejected it. With humorous curiosity he inspected the bottle and read aloud its guaranty of non-alcoholic innocence.

"That stuff's not meant to drink, but just to sell," he decided.

Still holding the bottle loosely in the hand which he had placed around Gilda's waist, he swung her back into the beat of the banjo. They gravitated toward the railing. Leaning far to one side in a newly discovered shading to the dance, his hand holding the bottle extended over the dancers on the floor below. The bottle tilted.

Directly beneath Arthur's booth were two of Nigger Joe's favorite habitués—she buxom, florid, vivacious, and one of the chief attractions for his male customers—her companion an oil well rigger, whose tanned face and muscled frame were in virile contrast to the allurement of his dancing partner.

The rigger's grin grew wider as his companion introduced a convulsive shudder into their dance. Her shoulders moved as if in ecstatic reaction to the tonal stimulant.

"Atta baby," he murmured ardently.

The expression of the woman changed from dreamy languor into one of alarmed surprise. Her eyes opened, startled. Her feet lost time to the music, and in moving to regain her poise, a sharp French heel was implanted on his toes.

On the balcony, Gilda and Arthur swayed undulating to the music. The bottle in Arthur's hand was tilted farther, and from its mouth poured a thin stream.

Suddenly the rigger's lady gazed upward with horrified realization. The rigger, following her glance, was first astonished, then indignant at the affront he saw, for here was a bimbo in a soup and fish pouring near-beer down his partner's decollete back!

Pandemonium followed.

"He can't do that to any lady friend of mine," the rigger bellowed to the world at large. Not waiting to observe the punctilio of an excuse for leaving his companion, he darted toward the stairway. Nigger Joe, from his strategic position in the rear of the room, saw that something was amiss, and followed. The lady of the beer-drenched gown seized at her chance for fame and screamed.

"I've been insulted!" she cried, half proudly. Feminine friends gathered to her aid, while their escorts, gallant and truculent, followed the rigger's lead.

First the rigger, then Nigger Joe, then the rank and file, rushed up the stairs.

Harry Maghan, intent on bearing libation from his booth to that of Arthur, was first to meet the onslaught, but was brushed ruthlessly aside, unable to respond to the rigger's demand of: "Where's the bird that poured the beer?"

Halted in their dance by the untoward cessation of the music, Arthur and Gilda turned toward the booth entrance at the sound of the approaching at-

tack. There was no time for parley. Thrusting away the restraining grasp of Nigger Joe, the rigger forced his way into the booth. Arthur, unaware of the cause of the turmoil, immediately realized his predicament, and that especially of Gilda. They were cornered.

The impending crisis clarified his senses.

"Quick! This way!" he guided, and swung her nearer to the rail.

As the rigger rushed toward him, Arthur grasped the table, turned it on its side, and shoved it at his opponent. The latter, unprepared for these tactics, stopped unconsciously to rub a barked shin, and the delay gave Arthur his opportunity.

"Harry! Blondy! All of you! Get the girls out! Quick!"

In the confusion Dumplings screamed.

"Oh, Harry!" she wailed; "save me!"

Arthur lifted Gilda in his arms, swung one leg astride the railing, and then with one foot locked in the woodwork, leaned far forward. The timber creaked ominously. The rigger, struggling to right the upturned table and get it out of his way, called venomous threats to Trevelyan, that detractor of womankind.

With Gilda's arms clinging around his neck, Arthur shifted his grasp, and with straining muscles lowered her, holding her suspended over the floor. By this time Maghan, the other men, and the girls of the party had executed a flank movement and had managed to pass behind the throng which was gathered outside the entrance to Arthur's booth. Half laughing, half in hysterical fear, the quondam

revellers ran pell-mell down the stairs and reached the floor.

Arthur's wrists were tortured with the strain as slowly, carefully, he let Gilda's arms slip through his grasp until their hands clenched, yet still not daring to allow her to drop.

The grating of the table behind him along the floor sounded warning that the rigger had overcome the barricade.

He stole a hurried glance backward to his enemy, then anxiously turned again toward the dance floor. Behind him came wrangling threats:

"Let go of me—I'll get him!"

"Behave yourself, white man," Nigger Joe was replying. "You'll have us all in the hoosegow."

Arthur called to Harry and Blondy:

"Here, you two, catch her! Hurry." The men ran forward as Arthur felt his grasp loosening. Their upstretched arms were within a few inches of Gilda's feet.

"Look out!" warned Arthur. He swung his burden sideways and then let go.

As in a dream Gilda felt herself drop dizzily in the brief descent. Then, bombarded with anxious queries as to the extent of her injuries, she found herself again on firm ground, and giving hysterical assurances that she was unharmed.

Another moment and Arthur, already half way over the rail, had parried a blow that had more intensity than aim, and had dropped beside the others.

Then before the onlookers who had remained on the dance floor had time to realize that this highly

entertaining episode was at an end, Arthur, his arm around Gilda, led the way toward the door. The others brushed through the throng, jostled each other in their eagerness to pass through the swinging doors, and found themselves once more upon the sidewalk and in safety.

## CHAPTER II

“**M**Y, my, my, Arthur!” Harry Maghan’s booming words re-echoed through the deserted streets. “What a splendid fellow you are! Such courage! Such cleverness, and at a time like this! You were superb, my boy, simply superb!”

The group, still flushed with the excitement of their escapade, paused for breath as the doors of Nigger Joe’s closed behind them. Though the approach of a milk wagon as it rounded the corner told of the waning darkness, their night was still young. Ahead were possibilities of finding some secluded “club” where they might still dance, of arriving simultaneously with the dawn for a day-break supper, of spurring their jaded muscles with a splash into some private outdoor swimming plunge, before sleepiness overcame them.

These roisterers were not on a “spree,” an occasional party to be experienced with a desperate deliberation to make a wild time of it. Theirs was not an intention to store up memories which might serve as a fund for anecdotes or a series of “do you remembers.” Instead, Trevelyan, Haniford, Maghan and their associates found nothing abnormal in their mode of entertainment. Nothing mattered. Their reactions to sensations were casual. Living for the moment, situations such as they had encountered in the dance-hall were to be met in a haphazard, devil-may-care manner. After them, the deluge.

Even their view-point toward each other was an impersonal one, and this condition remained true as between the men and women. The romance of boy and girl had long since been drained of any experimental thrill.

Gilda, of course, was an outsider.

The sharp interruption of scuffling figures which lurched through the swinging doors brought them from self-congratulatory amusement at their adventure back to realization of a new crisis.

With Nigger Joe struggling to hold him by one arm, and the resort's bouncer restraining him with difficulty by the other, the oil-well rigger was striving determinedly to reach the bimbo in the soup and fish who had poured beer down the dancing lady's back.

Dumplings Haniford was first to see him.

"Quick, Harry, get a taxi," she warned. "Remember, the last time you all got pinched you got a suspended sentence, and you know what that means if you get in a fight again."

Harry looked around for the taxi starter, to which person usually he entrusted these minor details. He even raised a commanding finger in the hope that an official in gold braid and buttons would materialize. Unfortunately, even the night hawk drivers by this time were respectably in bed.

Save for the loaded milk wagon, whose driver had disappeared down an area-way on his round of back-door visits, the street was empty of vehicles. Arthur, until now an amused and disinterested spectator, noticed the wagon and was lured by the charm of a fresh novelty.

"Here's our taxi, children," he announced.

"What, a milk wagon?" came in remonstrance.

"Certainly, you've been off the wagon long enough."

From the doorway Nigger Joe called a warning.

"You-all better beat it," he admonished. "This man's rarin' to go and a fight's what he craves nothin' else but."

Arthur sensed the wisdom of the advice.

"Take your choice," he offered, "a left punch or a milk punch."

He motioned toward the wagon and swung Gilda into his arms to accelerate the others.

Harry, with Dumplings, followed his example.

"All right," agreed Blondy, "let's take a joy-ride on the Milky Way."

So with Gilda and Arthur in the lead, some of the others running childlike hand in hand, and with Harry Maghan struggling unsuccessfully to retain his dignity while Dumplings tugged at his arm to hurry him, the embryo milkmen hurried to the wagon.

Nigger Joe chuckled at the unusual mode of departure from his saloon.

"'At'll be some milk-shake," he said.

The rigger, as disgusted as would have been Don Quixote if his windmills had run away from him, smiled sourly. "Sure thing," he replied, "with a bunch of eggs like that."

With elaborate gravity Arthur and Harry were disputing each other's fitness to occupy the driver's seat. Harry insisted that familiarity with pictures of English coaching fitted him for the post. Arthur





AFTER THE BALL

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Arthur grasped the reins and the lumbering horses ambled off.

countered with the reminder that the only thing Harry had driven was a golf ball, and that he usually sliced into the rough, at that. During the argument the others had found precarious seats on the tops of milk cans, on the side-boards, with their legs dangling over the edges, and one adventurous soul had mounted postilion-like the grey mare on the nigh side of the team.

Gilda solved the difficulty.

"Tell you what," she suggested to Harry, "you and Dumplings can have your own private seat in back, like the rear platform of an observation car."

Harry beamed benevolently.

"Dear, dear, dear Gilda! Who said women were beautiful but dumb?"

Harry swung Dumplings to the floor board at the rear of the wagon and clambered up beside her. Similarly Arthur elevated Gilda to the position of honor beside the driver. He grasped the reins, flourished the lash with a whipcrack worthy of a master of the Brighton post road, and the lumbering horses ambled off at a slow trot.

"Tallyho!" cried Harry from the rear of the wagon.

"Yoicks!" called Blondy, who vaguely remembered having read the word in connection with the description of a fox hunt or something; and the gang was on its way.

At the back door of a lodging house the milkman paused, startled, while in the act of gathering the empty bottles. The clatter of horse-hoofs on the asphalt rang alarmingly in his ears. The information the sound conveyed was unbelievable, yet un-

mistakable; for the first time in its fourteen years of service his team was moving on without him.

In his astonishment he absent-mindedly placed the full bottles he was about to deliver carefully with the tray of empties, and with equal care replaced the other empty bottles in their position on the door sill. The hoof beats were resounding from a greater distance, and the milkman ran. When he reached the street he was just in time to see the departing wagon, with as strange a load as never came from a dairy, swing round the corner from whence he came.

The milkman bellowed hoarsely. Only the laughter of a girl came in response. With two hundred gallons of milk at stake, and the whole wide city in which to pursue his quarry, the milkman followed, his short legs trying inadequately to meet the speed to which he urged them.

Trevelyan, Senior, swung open the front door of his home and stepped out onto the terrace. The early morning sun revealed a short, stocky, hale old duffer whose white hairs belied the youthfulness and vigor with which he greeted the crisp atmosphere of dawn.

He was attired in flannel shirt and knickers, with golf shoes and hose. Tentatively he hefted the golf-bag he was carrying. His bristly white mustache lifted with satisfaction at the early summer panorama which spread, sparkling in the clearness of the sun, before him.

From his position, on a broad expanse of terrace which skirted a residence built against the foothills, he viewed, as of a progression of receding steps, a sweep of cottage roof-tops extending to the valley beyond. Red, blue, orange, white, buff and var-tinted walls dotted the landscape beneath the roofs, from the chimneys of several of which thin plumes and spirals of smoke were beginning to ascend. For miles before him spread the residential part of the city where he lived.

Beyond, on a distant plateau, a forest of oil-well derricks jutted against the sky-line. From each of these, he would have figured had not the idea become too familiar for repetition, flowed a stream of dividend-paying petroleum. Beyond these were distant vistas of acreage, already browned by the sun, on which shrewd realty promoters held options against the time when the growth of the city should have converted them into marketable home-sites.

Away off to the west, an azure ribbon against the sky, stretched the Pacific, its surface broken by the rare sight of the islands made visible by the crystal clarity of the air. Behind him, whence came the pungent fragrant snap of chaparral and eucalyptus, were the rolling hills, extending to the sea. It was a land in which men were still winning an empire—a gambling board where stakes still were to be won by the highest hand.

Trevelyan inhaled sharply as his imagination tingled with the stimulant of what he saw. Perhaps, he thought, he had retired too soon. Not for the money involved; he had enough of that, both for the boy and for Lorraine, the youngster's

younger sister. But before him lay fortunes still to be won, and a game which might have enticed his boy into taking a hand. Perhaps, if he had not given up his business quite so soon, he might have persuaded Arthur into becoming first a beginner, and then a partner, in the play—

The purr of motor wheels on the drive broke his meditation. The car halted at the steps. Absently Trevelyan seated himself and the driver started his machine. The father's thoughts reverted to the boy. The young sprout, now, had not come home the night before; Trevelyan had made note of that in Arthur's empty room. Probably out dancing all night, out with that crowd of nit-wit boys and girls. Something must be done—the boy must not go wrong . . .

The newsboy hurling his morning papers against the door sills, the iceman stopping spellbound as he stared at the sight of the commandeered milk wagon, the Japanese huckster who grinned uncomprehendingly as he opened his fruit store, all the early morning servitors of civilization who witnessed the procession of the profligates, could have told Trevelyan, Senior, what Arthur and the nit-wit crowd were doing.

So also might have done the milkman, whose tired legs refused to carry him farther in pursuit of his pirated team, and who now hailed with reviving hope the motorcycle policeman who pulled up beside him.

"What's the idea?" demanded the official.  
"Whatta you running from?"

The milkman puffed for breath.  
"Not running from anything," he managed to  
gasp. "I'm after 'em."

The officer queried again.

"They—they stole my wagon," explained the  
milkman. "Took two hundred gallons of my best  
Grade A milk."

The policeman saw visions of his name and photo-  
graph in the afternoon papers, with accounts of his  
capture of the desperate milk bandits after a run-  
ning gun fight. He demanded details, and the milk-  
man stammered out the route taken by the thieves.

"I'll get 'em," pledged the policeman grimly, and  
he stepped on the gas.

Gilda, still beside Arthur on the driver's seat,  
raised her head from his shoulder and looked at  
him doubtfully. By this time the horses had re-  
fused to answer even the crack of the whip, and  
were moving at a sedate walk. Arthur smiled rosily  
at the world. It was a pretty good place, and every-  
one was happy. He glanced at Gilda to reassure  
himself of this fact.

"Ain't we got fun?" he queried.

Gilda hesitated.

"Yes—but—but—"

Her reticent response was overheard.

"But, yes, we have no bananas!" someone caroled.

"We've got milk, though—gallons, and quarts,  
and pints, and cans, and gallons, and quarts, and—"

Harry's statistical survey died in an overwhelming mass of detail.

"Think we haven't and you're crazy," commented Dumplings, happily.

"Of course it's fun," Gilda continued. "But won't it make more trouble for you? What about your father?"

Arthur frowned in an endeavor to focus on a suitable reply. He found it.

"Sufficient for the evil is the father thereof. Isn't that from Shakespeare?"

Gilda subsided. It *was* fun, to be playing around all night with these boys and girls, who made her an associate without question of their relative social or financial rank. She knew that this acceptance of her came from indifference rather than a liberal attitude; even so, it was more stimulating than her contact with the artificial, selfish element of the studio. And after all, her absence from these parties would not keep Arthur out of trouble; perhaps her presence sometime might serve to do so.

But Arthur was rich, and she was poor. She had heard of such situations many times; had read of them, had played in them, in fact. What, she wondered, was to be the outcome? None, probably. Somewhere some man had told her that things often never did reach a culmination; they just went out of existence unfinished. She wondered whether her association with Arthur would just expire like that, unfinished. Then the question which had been lurking insistently to spring upon her ever since she had met Arthur obtruded itself again, and this time demanded answer.

Would Arthur care if things—well, if things were just to die? He had told her he loved her; had asked her to marry him. But she had not been sure then—sure either of whether he had meant his question, or of whether she had the right to yield to her affection for him.

She had not found the words to express these doubts. She had been a starving soul hungering for expression, and balked by an intangible blanket of words which mocked at her and said things she did not mean. So she had learned to be chary in her use of them.

Probably it was true that he would care a little. Probably too he would be just as happy in a little while if his father, for example, were to prevent their marriage.

His father; what would he think of her? Not much, probably. Probabilities; questions. Anything was probable—and nothing. She wanted to do right—probably she wouldn't. Questions—invisible interrogation points that came as she had lain awake in the night.

Like wind dispelling a mist came the clatter of iron-shod hoof-beats on the street, monotonous, regular, cheerful, to drive introspective ideas away. She was here—here beside Arthur. These others with her asked no questions of tomorrow. They took things as they came, and were happy. Why not she?

As if in answer to the final query came Arthur's hand, freed from the reins, stealing into her own with a comforting pressure. She glanced upward again at him.

"Happy, dear?"

She nodded. Yes. Well, maybe. Anyway, here she was.

Through the placid layer of bibulous velvet with which Arthur had coated himself penetrated one thought. Here he was with this girl whom he loved. He had not thus expressed it to himself before, but now suddenly he told himself that she was different. Indeed, she seemed so. To hold her hand was not merely a casual caress. It was as if they two shared something much finer and emotional than a handclasp. She was sweet, too.

He found himself gazing downward into her eyes, which filmed with a tenderness that made itself felt in him. There was a childlike appeal in her glance. Why, she was in love with him! How could he hurt her by failing to return that love? A fleeting image of her eyes as if drawn in wounded heartache passed through his mind. To erase it he leaned forward hastily and kissed her.

Dumplings Haniford bestirred herself on the rear seat to see how near home she was, and glimpsed the spectacle of the meeting lips. She shouted.

"Ain't Nature grand!" she mocked. "Lemme be a bridesmaid!"

The interruption came just as the wagon had reached an intersection of the avenue with one of the main highways. Arthur, startled, pulled his arm away from Gilda's waist; and the same motion unconsciously moved the hand in which he held the reins. His loose grasp allowed one of the leathers to slip through his fingers. The resultant tug at the

line pulled sharply on the horses' bits, and they swerved abruptly to one side.

At that moment along the intersecting highway approached an automobile, its spotless custom-built body glittering in the sun. In the rear seat an elderly man, attired in golfing flannels, half rose with a shout of warning to the driver. The warning came too late.

As the horses, answering Arthur's tug at the reins, swung over to the wrong side of the road, the auto driver tried desperately, with screeching of brakes and hard-flung wheel, to avert the impending collision. Almost he succeeded; but not quite.

To the accompaniment of feminine screams of fear and ineffectual shouts of advice from masculine throats, there was a crash as the fender of the auto struck the milk-wagon. The blow was a glancing one; the left fore wheel of the milk wagon was sheared off neatly; and the heavy load in the body of the wagon toppled into the street.

Arthur, clinging to the one rein still in his grasp, tried vainly to quiet the plunging, fear-maddened horses. The clatter of their hoofs mingled with the tinkle of breaking bottles, and clang and jangle of the milk cans, as they dropped from the wagon-bed to the asphalt, bounced on the hard paving, and spilled their chalky contents in a miniature flood. The chauffeur, more cool-headed than the others, leaped from his seat and ran to seize the bridles of the horses.

Miraculously escaping alike the flying hoofs of the team and the bits of flying bottle-glass, Gilda, in

the first crash of the collision, had slid gently with the collapse of the wagon to the street, and had landed on her feet. Arthur, not so fortunate, found himself seated on the pavement in the midst of a rivulet of milk still pouring from a capsized can nearby. Dumplings, Harry, Blondy and the others had been scattered indiscriminately with the debris, and were gingerly testing arms and legs to make sure they had survived the impact.

From the rear seat of the automobile, spluttering with combined wrath and concern for the possible injuries to the odd freight of the milk-wagon, descended the elderly golfer, his white hair and mustache bristling with excitement.

"Who—where—what's the meaning of all this?" he demanded generally.

First to confront him was a slip of a girl, her blonde hair still lovely despite the disarray of her tumble. Breathless and nerve-shattered from the crash, she nevertheless essayed to answer.

"Oh! I'm—we're *so* sorry! Did we damage your car?"

The elderly man glared. His cheeks puffed as he withheld the only reply that struggled for expression. Incoherent sputterings followed as the man stared at the wreckage of human and lacteal freight.

Arthur, his attention for the moment wholly concerned with the annoying moisture of his milk-drenched clothes, was diverted by the sound of voices. As from a distance came sounds in a key that was elusively familiar. Somewhere, somehow, he had heard such sputterings before. Then, more

easily definable, Gilda's attempts to assuage the golfer's anger penetrated to Arthur's consciousness.

Stiffly he arose. Aside from bruises and a general impression that the whole world reeled and tilted as he gained his feet, he found himself uninjured. Struggling bravely to pull himself together and quell the mutiny of his wobbling knees, he made his way around the wagon to the place whence ensued the sputterings.

Gilda, he saw, was trying courageously to dam the torrent of words coming from the passenger in the auto. The latter's back was turned to Arthur; but in the attitude of the shoulders, the carriage of the snowy head, the very belligerence of the gesticulating arms, were danger signals which Arthur would have heeded had it not been for the appeal for aid in Gilda's face as she glanced at him over the other's shoulder. But Arthur was intent only on coming to Gilda's rescue. He stepped closer.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," he offered. "If there's anything we can do—"

Confident in his ability to find words which would adjust the difficulty, Arthur paused. At the interruption the elderly man pivoted sharply on his heel to seek a new victim for attack—one more worthy of his anathema. He opened his mouth, but no words came, not even sputterings. For once Mark Trevelyan faced a situation for which he had no phrases. He stared; he blinked, and stared again. Then he shook his head to drive away the effects of the hallucination, but the figure which filled him with astonished awe was still materialized.

Before him—with collar under one ear, shirt-front escaping from the confines of the waistcoat, and portions of the evening clothes metamorphosed into a pallid milky gray—Mark Trevelyan beheld his son.

Just then the put-put of a motorcycle exhaust came volleying from the horizon, swelled into a crescendo of pistol-like reports, and ended in an abrupt stop as the cyclist halted beside the wreck. The glint of sun on a burnished badge was reflected into Mark Trevelyan's eyes, and he blinked again. When he had recovered his sight it was to recognize beside his son the figure of a motorcycle policeman in uniform.

"What's the big idea?" queried the official.  
"You're all under arrest."

## CHAPTER III

TO Mark Trevelyan, standing between his auto and the wreckage of the milk wagon, the words of the policeman came ominously, like an icy shower, to clear his head from the foggy astonishment of meeting Arthur Trevelyan in the role of chief culprit. The father gasped for breath.

"What—what did you say?"

"I said you're all pinched," paraphrased the officer grimly.

Trevelyan drew himself up to the full extent of his sixty-six inches.

"What do you mean, sir!" he demanded. "It's an outrage! Upon what charge?"

As if running the gamut of the penal code, the policeman skated rapidly over the list of high crimes and misdemeanors of which the gathering was accused.

"First, grand larceny," he announced. "Highway robbery—reckless driving while intoxicated—" he glanced balefully at Arthur, whose jaw was drooping at realization of the enormity of his offenses—"exceeding the speed limit—" the nigh mare cocked an incredulous ear at this construction placed upon her leisurely gait—"peddling without a license, and—and—and disorderly conduct," the officer concluded lamely.

The arrival of a flivver broke in upon the roll of indictments. From it descended the milkman, who

ran toward the group with accusatory finger pointed at Arthur.

"There," shouted the milkman. "There's the one who done it. He ought to get ten years for it, too."

"Ten years!" Gilda, who had drawn closer to Arthur to lend him the moral support of her presence, was dismayed. "Oh—they wouldn't!"

Her interjection was an unfortunate one, for it drew to her the milkman's attention. His irate glance rested upon her evening attire, still a setting for her beauty, but emphasizing, in the bright sunlight, what seemed to the milkman the hollowness and sham of the society life.

"It's butterflies like you," he denounced, "that's the real cause of bolshevism and such. You'll pay well for this, and it's all Grade A milk."

At the word of payment, Old Man Trevelyan saw a solution to the difficulty.

"Isn't there some way we can fix this, officer?" he asked.

The policeman showed the appropriate hesitancy.

"Well, I don't know," he dissembled. "This young man—" and he indicated Arthur—"this young man faces pretty serious charges."

Trevelyan glared at his son.

"Teach you a lesson if I did let him lock you up," he told Arthur dourly. "Still—"

The father reached into an inside pocket and fumbled surreptitiously with a bill-fold.

"Here is my card, officer. If there is anything further, you'll find me at that address."

The policeman, impressed with the numerals on the "card," exhibited it to the milkman, who once

more felt the milk of human kindness flow within him. The two withdrew, the policeman to resume his beat, and the tradesman to repair the ravages of the astonishing interlude which had brought him in such intimate and informal contact with an existence which previously he had glimpsed only via the back door.

Trevelyan, having once more regained composure through another demonstration of the efficacy of his money, again became dominant. He turned his attention to Arthur, who stood waiting, for all the world like a small boy caught in a peccadillo. Beside his son the father observed the same young woman who had had the temerity to speak to him just after the collision. She was a blonde thing—nothing substantial to her—just one of these nit-wit boys and girls with whom his son was dissipating his youth away—

Arthur sensed the disapproval in his father's observation of Gilda. An errant spark of chivalry glowed for a moment, and he tried to place her in a less equivocal light.

"Listen, Father," he began, "let me tell you about it. This is Miss—"

"I don't want to hear who she is," Trevelyan snapped. "Get in the car."

"But I can't leave—"

"Get in the car!"

Arthur hesitated. He was unwilling to abandon Gilda so unceremoniously.

Gilda placed a persuasive hand upon his arm.

"Go, dear," she whispered. "Don't make him more bitter."

"Then I'll 'phone you this evening," Arthur replied, and stepped into the car. His father followed, and the door slammed.

"See you in Sunday school," Dumplings called.

Trevelyan's angry contempt was intensified by the flippant remark. He glanced sideways at his son, and was about to comment on it, then decided to save his words for home consumption. Arthur, chagrined, resentful, and yet a little ashamed of himself, sat staring at the driver's neck, awaiting the storm which he knew was coming.

Ever since her mother's death, at a time when she had been a large-eyed, spindle-shanked youngster, Lorraine Trevelyan had borne, seared in her memory, Mrs. Trevelyan's parting admonition:

"You'll have to take my place, dear. Be a good housekeeper—help your father fight for his success—and love your brother for me."

For at the time that Lorraine and Arthur, he in close-brushed Norfolk jacket and knickers, with tear-stained cheeks which he strove with a boy's embarrassment to hide, she stricken numb with incomprehension, with eyes dry-lidded, had watched Mrs. Trevelyan go, Mark Trevelyan was still in the turmoil of desperate undertakings, with only uncertainty ahead.

Those earlier days had been ones of grave responsibility for her. With the seriousness and intensity of adolescence, the double burden of abiding by her mother's wish and of helping her father fight had

meant for Lorraine the necessity of developing a poise and clear-thoughtedness which she was never to lose.

There were times when Trevelyan, immersed in the intricacies of manipulating leaseholds, options, loans, and the juggling of credit to keep his whole pyramided structure from collapsing, would remain, seated at the kitchen table, for hours buried in a mass of figures and geological surveys. At such moments Lorraine, awe-struck with the fearsomeness of the conflict in which her imagination depicted her father, would marshal Arthur quietly from the room, careful lest they distract this hero of hers from his battle.

Times, too, there were when Lorraine, seated upon the steps of their small cottage while her darning needle struggled with the seemingly bridgeless gaps in Arthur's stockings, would lay her house-work hastily aside to run and join him in conflict with some juvenile foe. Side by side they would fight, and hers were not the least of the blows struck. Then, come victory or defeat, their comradeship would be replaced by her mother-instinct, and regardless of the jibes of the other youngsters on the block, carefully she would wipe his bloody nose and be ready to resume either fight or frolic.

Out of this half-motherly, half-twinlike devotion of the girl for the boy had developed a dispassionate, yet poignantly tender affection between the two which had bridged the difference in their ages. Where Arthur was to be seen, there, too, was Lorraine, usually a little in the rear, where she might at the same time watch his natural leadership among

his companions, with the adoration of a younger sister, and be prepared to exert the mothering upon which Arthur, even during his gawky period, came more and more to depend.

Then, in the few short years which had seemed to pass overnight, came the oil. As if brought to a state of flux by the intensive fire of his energy, the schemes and machinations of Mark Trevelyan reached their climax, and out of them crystallized a wealth surpassing his dreams.

Followed homes, servants, luxuries. Deprived now of the necessity of daily stratagems with the butcher and the grocer, Lorraine at first felt herself adrift. But still under the subconscious spur of fulfilling the destiny which her mother had chosen for her, her affection for her father and brother found an outlet in directing, with a wisdom beyond her years, the expenditure of the wealth which Trevelyan lavished upon his children.

Came finishing school, and colleges. The wrench of their first separation was assuaged through the long distance contact by which Lorraine still tried to be her brother's *alter ego*. Disquieting rumors reached her of Arthur's escapades at school; and as the expenses of his maintenance mounted, and as the over-drafts on his allowance became more recurrent, Lorraine found herself taking up again a new phase of the old burden, that of acting as buffer between father and son.

High lights—purple passages—during this period when the rough surfaces of their youth were being polished, were the Christmas vacations, the Easter holidays, and the summer jaunts all over the world,

which brought the three of the family together. Trevelyan, having won his stake, had cashed in, and had safeguarded the proceeds with the utmost security which bankers and lawyers had been able to devise. Now, with no further active interest than in his quarterly income report, he had lapsed to a position of secondary importance so far as the advancement of the family was concerned, and except for his effort at restraint of Arthur's excess of animation, allowed Lorraine to direct their comings and goings.

London, Paris, Deauville during its season, the Riviera, saw the trio as familiar figures in which the devotion and affection between Lorraine and Arthur caused the more sophisticated of European observers to raise a skeptical eyebrow. Of course, it might be true that the young people were relatives, but who, my dear, ever saw a brother and sister so attentive to each other?

Had the gossip-hungry doubters been more observant, the striking resemblance between the two would have dispelled any question of ambiguity. Arthur's darkness of hair and fairness of skin, the heritage of some Gaelic-Spanish ancestor, were reflected in the somberness of Lorraine's blue-black locks and the ivory pallor of her cheeks. The same blue eyes which with Arthur were twinkling windows of the happy-go-lucky spirit within, became in Lorraine deep ebony-fringed pools that hinted of depths that had not yet been plumbed.

Alike, too, were their bodies. His massive frame and tall figure had their counterpart in Lorraine's lithe slenderness. The spindle shanks had been

transformed. She was like a Toledo blade. There was a rapier-like quality, cool to the touch, which was accentuated by the sheen of her exquisiteness.

It was this suggestion of tempered steel held in its sheath, of reserve forces kept in leash beneath a poised and tranquil exterior, which had its biological unison with Arthur's extravagances. With Arthur, freedom from economic restraint had meant a surplus of exuberance, with the tempering process still to be developed; with Lorraine, however, the rough metal already had been beaten upon the anvil; and the glory of the finished product was waiting in shimmering expectancy, albeit unconsciously, the test of the master mechanic.

In this nascent period of Lorraine's being, her almost constant association with Arthur was responsible for her impersonal, ascetic attitude toward other men. She understood that impulses existed which impelled her would-be sweethearts to become ardent in their pursuit of her, but she recognized no answering stir within herself and regretted what seemed to be an unfortunate and annoying metamorphosis that robbed her of likable acquaintances and substituted changeling swains. The flint had not yet struck the steel, though the tinder awaited the spark.

Thus, serenely unaware of the potency of her transcendent beauty, she had been moved so far only by the abstract emotions of the mind, and she exuded an aura that hinted of a shadowed field lying fallow beside a snow-fed stream.

Cool, also, were her rooms. Cool were the greens and blues of the few drapes and Chinese rugs; and

cool were the filtered pools of sunlight that fell upon them, to blend restfully with the walls of softly tinted cream and buff.

An economy of taste, remaining from that earlier period when ornaments meant dust, and dust meant labor, was reflected in the sparse furnishings of the lounge and bedroom which formed her quarters. The carefully chosen paintings, and the occasional objets d'art which transformed the rooms from bareness to a wholly feminine abode, were fragile and unobtrusively dainty.

From the mullioned windows of her lounging room spread a vista of sun-baked meadows and landscaped boulevards, stretching lazily to the sea, while beyond the French doors opening into her bedroom, so near that often it seemed that she might step out to them, were the hills—her hills that had given her many moments of breath-catching dashes astride a horse, or of peaceful solitudes in which she strolled along the trails winding among the chaparral and wild holly.

A crisp tonic of mountain fragrance swept into the bedroom as the maid drew aside the portieres and allowed all of California seemingly to be encompassed within the four walls. Lorraine awoke. There was a lilt on her lips as drowsily at first, and then with joyful reaction to the beauty of the panorama resting quiescent in the morning sun, she responded to the happiness of being alive.

From the service wing of the house the odor of bacon broiling on the coals brought her from a feline sense of luxurious laziness to a sharp reality

of hunger. She turned to the maid, who had just stilled the flow of water for her bath, and asked:

"Has father had his breakfast?"

"Yes, Miss Lorraine—early," replied the maid. "He left an hour ago, for the club."

"And Mr. Arthur? If he is awake, please ask him when he will be ready to breakfast with me."

During the icy plunge, and in the moments of dressing that followed, Lorraine's thoughts came recurrently of Arthur. Recently, she knew, the group of young folk with whom he spent his time and money, had carried him into more and more frequent elaborations of jazz and its component parts. His was an attitude of sophistication and cynical disregard of consequences which was at variance with his former ingenuous delight in frolicking. There was one scrape—but of that she knew only a fragmentary outline, for Mark Trevelyan had withheld from her the details, and Arthur, when questioned, had dissembled.

"Mr. Arthur has not been home," stated the maid, returning. "His bed has not been used."

Another all night party. This meant that Arthur, if he did come home that morning, would sleep until noon, and that her father, grumbling, would demand explanations which Arthur, sullen, would resent.

As she finished dressing, and paused for a final glance in the mirror at the effect of her sports attire, Lorraine's hope was that if only Arthur were to return before her father had finished his round of golf, she might be able to smuggle her brother into his room and to bed without having Trevelyan dis-

cover the signs of carousal that, she took for granted, would be conspicuous.

As if in response to her hope, the sound of the opening and closing door in the foyer carried her eagerly to the balustrade in the up-stairs hall, from where she might glimpse the floor below.

There she saw Arthur, downcast and sulky, stride out of sight into the library opening off the foyer.

Behind him, to her dismay, Lorraine caught a fleeting glance of her father as he followed quickly, with ire determination, after the other.

Before the doors of the library had swung closed behind the two, the father's words echoed upward to the anxious girl.

"You've had your chance," Trevelyan was saying.  
"I've warned you before, and now I'm through."

## CHAPTER IV

AS a ship's passengers, in the midst of a placid voyage, are panic-swept when the vessel strikes a hidden reef, so came Trevelyan's words to crash disastrously across the tranquil tenor of Lorraine's household. The finality of her father's phrase: "I've warned you before; now I am through," made her faint with apprehension as she clung to the balustrade and listened. Her heart pounded, and she felt a giddiness that swept over her with her realization of the sudden crisis which Arthur had precipitated into their home.

In dimly rolling thunders of Trevelyan's denunciations, interspersed with the staccato of Arthur's remonstrances and self-defense, the angered voices of the two men echoed from the library. Hardly daring to intrude, yet still prompted by the instinctive spur to act as shepherdess for her diminutive flock, Lorraine was aware that she must act quickly to avert a ruinous clash between father and son.

Her feet flying, she ran quickly down-stairs into the library.

Arthur sat slouched upon the lounge. Before him his father paced back and forth, his words punctuated with the angry rhythm of his short steps and irate gestures.

Trevelyan wheeled at the sound of Lorraine's entrance.

"You can save your breath," he told her. "Your brother's gone too far. I have stood all of his dissoluteness that I can—and now I'm through."

"But, father, wait! What is it all about?"

Sketchily, stressing the high points of the escapade which had ended in the collision, Trevelyan told of the climax to Arthur's prodigality. When he had finished, Lorraine looked at her brother for confirmation or denial. Arthur was silent.

"I've pulled him out of other scrapes," Trevelyan added, as if justifying himself to Lorraine, "and didn't mind so much. I wanted him to have a good time. But each affair has gone farther; sooner or later, if he has not already done so, he will be involved in some shameful thing which will wreck our lives."

Arthur shifted impatiently in his chair, resentful of being so discussed objectively.

"But it would not be that," Lorraine offered. "After all, it was only done in fun."

"Fun! Do you call stealing a milk wagon fun? Do you call it fun to create hardships for a man struggling to make a living? Arthur would know better if he had to earn *his* living."

Arthur stirred restlessly again. He knew what was coming next. "Now, don't repeat all that," he protested. "You know there's no sense in my going to work."

Trevelyan stormed anew at this.

"Sense? Of course there is sense! I had to go

to work. If I had not, where would you be now? It is the only thing that would save you—that is, if you could hold a job."

The slur stung Arthur to response.

"Of course I could hold a job," he flared. "That is just the trouble! Anyone for whom I worked would know I was 'Old Man Trevelyan's son,' and would make it easy for me. What would be the use of my starting at the bottom, as you call it, and working my way up, when everyone would boost me along, with your money always in mind?"

"It might be different if you were still in business; then I could learn the groundwork first, and gradually might be able to step into your shoes. That would be fun—the fun that you had, taking chances and winning. But why work and sweat away, with the cards all stacked so that I am sure to win?"

"Besides, what's the difference, anyway? Here we are, who love each other, wrangling like competing hucksters. There was a chap once—the other night—who said we were all like gnats on a decrepit orange—that's the way it seems."

But Trevelyan had no sympathy with such subversive theories.

"That's poppycock! Sounds like a quotation from some half-baked Russian radical."

"It's true," insisted Arthur, with the absolutism of youth.

"But you are wrong, Arthur—you're wrong," Lorraine interposed. "No one expects you to sweat unpleasantly. That isn't necessary. But with what

dad has already given us to build upon, you can go so much farther."

She moved beside him.

"Think of the resources and power at your command, once you showed him you could use them wisely! Think of the thrill of employing them to achieve big results—of the satisfaction you would gain in having people know you as Arthur Trevelyan, instead of as 'Old Man Trevelyan's son.' "

She wheeled impulsively toward her father.

"Please, Dad, won't you help me make him see it that way? Give him one more chance."

Trevelyan shook his head.

"I've said this was the last; and I'll stick to it."

But Lorraine had not exhausted her ammunition of appeals.

"When I was little," she reminded, "Mother told me to help you fight to win success. You've said I did. Won't you help me to help us all?"

Trevelyan struggled between stubbornness and affection for his boy. He glanced at Arthur, whose eyes met his, then turned away, then raised again to meet his father's gaze. In them the old man saw something of a bewildered appeal which drew his memory back to the days before the oil. "I don't know," he murmured.

Lorraine was quick to take advantage of his vacillation.

"Arthur!" she ordered, "come here!"

The boy arose. Came a momentary vision to Lorraine of her brother being haled shame-faced

before his teacher. Then Arthur raised his head and held forth his hand.

"Please, Dad—I'll try."

Arthur raised his tortured head from the pillow, and the glare of noon stabbed at his eyes as he became conscious of the insistent clamor of a telephone on the stand at his bedside. He tossed upon his other ear, trying to shut out the world, but the summons of the bell was not to be denied.

"Hello-ullo!" Harry Maghan's voice crashed against the transmitter when Arthur lifted the instrument from its hook. "What's the good word?"

Arthur murmured an inarticulate reply.

"Just wanted to see if you were still alive," explained Harry. "Did the old walrus devour you?"

Still retaining some of the contrite spirit under which he had become reconciled with his father earlier in the day, Arthur took umbrage.

"You mean my father?"

"Oh—ah—a thousand pardons, Arthur! I wouldn't for the world—but, I say! What are you doing tonight?"

"I'm turning in early, and tomorrow start to work."

"Fine—fine—splendid! Just the thing for you! Be one of our captains of industry yet! Let's celebrate in honor of the event!"

Arthur tried desperately to cling to his fast fleeting resolutions.

"Can't do it—got to have a clear head in the morning."

"To be sure—good old clear-headed Arthur! Always there with the old intellect—but listen—this will be your last chance before you go for the straight and narrow."

"Well—"

"Atta boy! We'll get Gilda, Dumplings and the crowd, and let them all know you are going to be a man of affairs—business affairs, I mean. What do you say?"

"Well—"

"All right—meet you at 9:30."

As Arthur hung up the receiver he suffered a momentary twinge of conscience, but after all, he thought, there could be no harm in one more party. Besides, he remembered Gilda's winning smile, her tenderness and charm as she had last sat beside him at the cafe table. He began running over in his mind his assets of liquid resources, then turned to the phone to call his bootlegger.

A steady stream of headlights, each one piercing the blackness of the rear seat of that preceding it to reveal silhouettes of couples seated close, moved like the links of an endless chain on the boulevard to the beach, in testimony to the popularity of the roadhouses which, lining the avenue, had been established beyond the city limits to circumvent the municipal ordinance that prohibited dancing after midnight.

The most frequented of these roadhouses was "The Old Homestead," whose rough-hewn, low-eaved timbers expanded generously in the midst of

the orange-grove that separated it discreetly from the highway.

As if mocking the seclusion that "The Homestead" pretended to offer, cleverly concealed spot-lights on the grounds of the roadhouse threw its outlines into a silvery relief against the velvet dark. Through one of these beams of radiance approached two taxicabs, their occupants alighting onto the broad porch puncheons that contributed to the pioneer atmosphere, ingeniously contrived by metropolitan decorators.

The towering figure of a man with the stature and face worthy of the brush of a Remington, had opened the doors of the two cars. Now, in ironical contrast to the simplicity and rugged independence of the symbolic homesteader in whose rough mode of attire he was garbed, the doorman ushered them servilely into the place. The creature was an inspiration on the part of the management. He was the last touch to the ensemble that limned the free and open spaces of the West.

"I'm sorry I had to crowd you into the taxis," apologized Arthur as the group paused to remove their wraps. "I didn't dare take my car out of the garage. I'm supposed to have retired early, to be ready for the career tomorrow."

The floor captain, in a refinement of the doorman's costume, nodded in recognition as Arthur led his guests into the dance room, and conducted the group to "ringside" seats. The room was in semi-gloom. Subdued arc-lights, in a semblance of old-fashioned hanging oil lamps, shed a soft radiance downward. The rays, mellowed by a haze of

smoke, touched with a flattering amber the crowded faces on the floor and at the tables. Rough-finished timberings of the furniture added to the sense of sombre intimacy, and enhanced the gloss and perfect polish of the dance floor which the tables surrounded.

The room was thronged when Arthur and his companions reached their seats. The dance floor was so crowded that the gyrating, elbow-jostling couples could only rotate slowly in the orbit of their path. From behind the low-hung rafters more concealed spots and flood lights, their effects borrowed from the contrivances of the motion picture craftsmen at studios nearby, picked out intermittently, as the dance throng moved across the nimbus of light, faces of young men and women who had become known to all the world by the medium of the screen. Some of these were too elaborate, with too much of the *dernier cri* in their attire; others affected a carelessness of dress as if to say: "I am beyond the necessity of appearance for appearance's sake."

Mingled among these, and pitifully aping their modes and mannerisms were the representative scores of the countless numbers who formed a fringe of the intricate tapestry in which "The Homestead" was an important design. Extra girls—motion picture buckaroos who had shed their "chaps" to wear point-perfect evening clothes—shop girls and business office employees—girls who had worked for months to acquire the one evening gown which now they were submitting to the risk of ruin by a perspiring hand or an upset glass—dancing men—men who made quick, though im-

permanent profits out of the lush expansion of the city—elderly men, who were being tolerated as casual and transient escorts by feminine companions willing to accept anything in trousers that offered escape from the monotony of workaday life—the ripple of silk—the latest “hit” from Tin Pan Alley—the glance over a powdered, gleaming shoulder into eyes that beckoned—the subtle suggestion whispered in the ear—over all, the indefinable, pervasive *odeur du femme* and of priceless perfumes, bartered in fragments of the ounce—all these were “The Homestead,” that decked itself in the guise of the pioneer.

Once, in his cups, a whimsical wight swore that one night, as the last of the sybarites was departing, and as the bus-boys were placing chairs upon tables, he had seen the wraith of a settler, attracted from outside by the ruddy comfort and familiar design of the building, wander in for hospitable shelter, during a spiritual return to the trail he had followed in the path of Lewis and Clark.

Beside the baton of the orchestra leader the apparition laid his ox-goad. He puzzled at the usurpation of the mouth organ and fiddle by the saxophone and clarinet. Cheered by his recognition of the familiar fixtures, the settler tried to reach a hanging lamp to ignite his pipe, only to receive a stinging shock when he short-circuited the baby arc.

A remnant of one of mammy’s hoe cakes, as per that part of the menu printed in English, had been overlooked at a serving table, and this the pioneer began to eat; but the savor of the skillet and camp-

fire were drowned under an unintelligible French sauce.

There was something sad about this ghost, had observed the bibulous one; "The Homestead" had been staked out in other lands than the broad acres the pioneer had won from the wilderness. In the period when Kansas was "a dark and bloody ground," there was no cover charge for the board spread for the wayfarer.

Yet, in the fantastic vision of the inebriate drowsing at his table, there had been a humor, born of the rancher's ethereal view-point, apparent in his philosophical smile as he dematerialized himself in time to avoid being drawn in the maw of a vacuum sweeper being operated by a Greek.

Arthur scanned the menu. Exotic viands were listed beside primitive dishes that were in course of preparation by an imported chef. His suggestions fell flat. None of his crowd was hungry. "To-night, we drink," insisted Dumplings. Arthur ordered the inevitable cracked ice and ginger ale. "Bring plenty of glasses," he added. Then, as the opening bars of a melody adapted to the "Chicago" were struck, Gilda touched his arm.

"We must have the first one together," she invited. The others followed their example. Soon they were merged, swallowed up, amid the pressing numbers of bodies upon the floor.

When the last bribe had been tossed to the orchestra leader for another encore, and the merry-makers had reluctantly returned to their seats, they found the ingredients for their drinks awaiting them.

While Arthur produced his bottle from its hiding place beneath the table, the others turned their attention to the favors that had been distributed during their dance. Absurd trifles—ludicrous fools' caps and tri-corners with silly cockades perched on brim—were donned by the girls and men. Before each plate, tethered by the weight of silverware, floated miniature spherical and cigar-shaped balloons, buoyed up by the gas that inflated them.

Gilda touched her glass to her lips in answer to Arthur's nod, and their glances joined over the brims. Arthur swallowed deep, then, in an aside to Gilda, observed: "This stuff's all right, but I like to have it talk back to me."

Holding the half-empty glass between his knees, he produced his concave hip flask and swathed it in a napkin, the better to fortify his drink without observation by the others.

"Please, not too much—be careful," Gilda begged.

Arthur restored the hip flask willingly enough to his pocket.

"Do you care?"

The tone of his voice attached a significance to his inquiry that Gilda was not ready to recognize.

"Of course I care," she responded. She paused for a moment to phrase her response lightly in words which would not hint of the passionate turmoil that swayed her. She was still unwilling to admit, even to herself, that there was anything in Arthur's interest, in his view-point of her, other than a random play at lovemaking.

"Naturally I care," she repeated. "You are my

friend, and I know you have things at stake. This work of yours tomorrow—”

“But do you *care*? ”

Arthur’s emphasis of the last word imparted to it a deeper meaning than she had been willing to recognize in her first reply. It was significant of his Anglo-Saxon heritage, that even in spite of the reckless use of careless phrases to which Arthur and his friends were accustomed, he shrank, as would have done the others in similar emotional crises, from a direct use of a term denoting the idea of amour.

Gilda again equivocated. She was not being purposefully elusive or coy, but the path into which she was being drawn was one in which she saw quick-sands for the unwary; and a hard background of experience had schooled her into cognizance of a drab coat of sizing often to be found beneath the patine of rosy paintings.

“I don’t know—” Then she became straightforward. “I like you—I am very fond of you—but I would try not to love very much anyone for whom life seems to hold no more than parties, drinking, good times—I have heard too often of what follows.”

“But it *would* hold more—with you,” Arthur insisted.

This was a new role he was playing; and though that part of him that found utterance was sincere, serious, even ardent, he was conscious at the same time of standing apart from himself and enjoying

with amused sympathy the spectacle of the comedy which he was enacting.

"If you were with me, there would be a purpose in working and amounting to something," he continued. "Oh, I know I have been a waster, and that what Dad says about me is true; but I have always had a feeling that so long as I kept within some kind of bounds, it did not matter much. With you beside me, though, I could do big things, things that would make you proud of me. Think of the power of Dad's money!"

Mention of the money suggested a new thought.

"It *isn't* the money?" he asked. "Surely, surely you would not let that stand in the way? Why, everybody knows we once had nothing, and were dirt poor."

Gilda looked at him frankly. "No, it *isn't* the money—not entirely—" she answered. "At least, if I were sure I wanted you to marry me, so long as you knew it was not for the money, I would not care what outsiders thought."

"And aren't you sure? Please—"

Arthur stood poised on the brink, then took the plunge. "I love you! Tell me you love me—a little!"

She swayed. Then she looked eagerly upward into his face and saw the effulgence of lovelight in his eyes. The intensity of his gaze suffocated her momentarily, and the inhibitions which she had erected for herself were swept away in a flood of emotion. Her eyes closed for a moment, while she strove desperately to marshal her courage; then, forcing herself to look at him, she nodded.

As if her admission sponged away the cobwebs of doubts and sophistries which had obscured his way of thinking, a torrent of clairvoyant tenderness burst upon him that was to be scored, afterward, ineffably in his memory. Almost too incisive to be tolerated was the realization that this girl had drawn aside the glass screen of her defenses, and was submitted to him exposed and weaponless.

At the same moment he became aware insidiously that this spectator, this *alter ego* of his, was suggesting that hers was the culmination of an adroit campaign; but in the exaltation of his renaissance, he put the thought aside as of an unworthy mood.

He leaned forward, trying to brush her cheek with his lips. Gilda suddenly became conscious of the presence of the others, and embarrassed, drew away from him.

One of the balloons, swayed by the miniature hurricane created in the wake of a passing waiter, swung toward Arthur's face. An inspiration came. Quickly he passed his hands around the table, and gathered the other seven or eight toys which were floating above their heads.

One by one, his hands working rapidly, he gathered the bobbing, distended bags on the table before Gilda and himself. Spoons, forks, salt cellars formed mooring stakes from which the balloons, at the level of their heads, tugged at their cotton cables. Their effect was to create a semi-opaque screen which shut out the rest of the party at the table and left Gilda and Arthur in apparent privacy.

"Now!" exclaimed Arthur with satisfaction at his cleverness. Gilda, love hungry, and at the same

time eager to humor the small boy spirit which had prompted the trick, consented. Their heads drew together.

Harry Maghan was engrossed in hearing a long reminiscence, in which Dumpling's was becoming involved in a maze of: "He said that I said that she said that I said that he said—"

Through the tangled mass of words came one distinct impression, that before him was being enacted an amazing tableau.

"Oh, lookit!" he called. "Look at Romeo and Juliet!"

Silhouetted in sharp relief against the glare of the light behind them, the heads of Gilda and Arthur were plainly visible through the transparent bubbles of the balloons. To the delighted interest of the onlookers, their lips came closer, were poised for a moment with an infinitesimal fraction of an inch separating them—then met.

Harry Maghan took his cigarette from an ash tray, and hastily seized another from Dumpling's hand. He reached outward.

For a moment the glowing cylinders were poised beneath the two balloons nearest the caressing couple and then moved upward. There were two sharp reports. The filmy bags disintegrated, vanished—and the diminutive explosions came crashing to bring Gilda and Arthur back to a material world. They drew hastily apart to find themselves staring, bewildered, into a sea of grinning faces.

Gilda was first to regain her composure. "Who threw the bomb?" she asked in an endeavor to cover her confusion.

"I did!" declared Maghan. "I have an idea!"

"Impossible!" objected Dumplings.

"Oh, but I have! Just the thing for the end of a perfect day! It's a wonder it didn't occur to me before. We'll all be in on it, and a pleasant time will be had by all."

"Come on, spill it and don't talk so much."

"But this is important—just the thing for Arthur, too, now that he is going to be a business man—"

"Hurry up! Spill it!"

"An elopement!"

The daring of the idea was breath-taking.

"But she hasn't any trousseau," objected Dumplings, the practical one.

"That's all right," Blondy offered. "We'll gather some orange blossoms on the way."

Arthur, suffused with a glowing warmth, found the idea all to his liking.

"Will you?" he whispered. "Are you game?"

Gilda was storm-swept in a maelstrom of conflicting currents.

"Oh, I couldn't."

"Yes, you can! Say, yes, dearest, and tomorrow I will go to work and settle down."

Chiaroscuro pastels of vine-covered homes, with herself at the swinging gate waiting in the evening for Arthur's return, rose before her in dim contrast to memories of one-night stand hotels, and of theatrical troupes drowsing on railroad platforms at four o'clock in the morning. Underneath was the insistent throb of the thought: "You love him—you love him—why not?"

"Please, dearest, let's be married right away!"

His impetuous ardor brushed away any further hesitancy. As she had done a few moments before, so now she glanced at him clear-eyed and unafraid, and moved her head in acquiescence.

Harry Maghan, who had been watching the little drama, arose and left the table. He approached the orchestra and whispered in the leader's ear.

"Gilda, let me be maid of honor?" begged Dumplings.

"Who will give the bride away?" another asked.

Gilda toyed with a play on words and then replied:

"I'm giving myself away. But I'm getting, I know, far more than I can ever give."

Some phrase to express his own sense of unworthiness was on Arthur's lips, but Maghan's return to the table stopped its utterance.

"Dear, dear Arthur!" volleyed Harry. "What a lucky chap you are! Congratulations! But you don't deserve her!"

"I know it," agreed Arthur, "but just for saying so you will have to stand up as best man."

Maghan, beaming with importance, signaled to the orchestra. Guests at other tables looked up, first in amazement, and then in self-conscious enjoyment of the indelicacy of the air, as the strains of the hackneyed wedding march punctuated their conversation.

Indifferent to the protestations and embarrassed remonstrances of Gilda and Arthur, Harry insisted that the couple arise, and he won his point. Then, marching with absurd gravity before them, with

one hand holding an imaginary Book of Common Prayer and the other beating out the rhythm of the measure, Harry led the bridal procession. Gilda yielded to the boyishness with which Arthur swung themselves at the head of the line. Behind her Dumplings abandoned the role of maid of honor to become train bearer, while the others, burlesquing their respective parts, brought up the rear.

The drinkers and diners, aware that either here were newlyweds or those about to enter that state, took Maghan's cue. Streamers of serpentine shot through the air to be festooned upon the bridal party in lieu of rice, handfuls of confetti floated colorfully through the smoke-laden inclines of light.

So, etched dizzily in the beam of the electric arc as they passed across the dance floor, and shrinking from the curious gaze of those at the tables between which they wound, Gilda, as in a daze, found herself being led out of "The Homestead," and onto the veranda.

Here the bracing stimulus of the night air restored her to an acute perception of what she was doing. She closed her eyes. Problems came back—question marks recurring to gleam red against her eyelids. What was it all about? Who was this man beside her who was to become her husband? What was she doing; what was she about?

Then, with eyes reopened but still unseeing, she felt herself drawn into a taxi and Arthur's arms around her, with his lips, feverish, touching hers.

## CHAPTER V

THROUGH the long hours which had followed their departure from "The Homestead" until they had reached the local Gretna Green in an adjoining county, the taxicab had purred its way in a monotone of accompaniment to the confused impressions which Gilda gathered of this midnight matrimonial journey.

To lean restfully against Arthur's shoulder; to listen, not quite comprehending the words of reassurance and high ambition that he murmured in her ear, yet lulled into composure by the cadences of his voice; to gaze as in a fairyland at the occasional strings of jeweled lights which spaced the long boulevard to mark the sleeping suburban towns; to note the fragrance of the blossoming orange trees and of the crimson ramblers that ran in hedgerows along the asphalt; to dwell again and again on the words, "I love him, I love him," that were spoken noiselessly on her lips in counterpoint to the muffled reverberation of the motor; all these were a crazy-quilt pattern that had been woven about the interminable ride.

Harry Maghan had insisted on occupying a seat opposite the driver; not only, he asserted, to make sure that the turtle doves remained free from interruption, but in case some motor cop might bring them before a magistrate for a ten-day speed sentence instead of a life term.

The others, Dumplings bewailing Harry's desertion of her at a time like this and tearfully accepting Blondy's assuaging sympathy, had crowded into a second taxi which followed a few hundred yards behind.

There was an exultant backfire of the motor as the taxi reached its destination. Harry Maghan, clinging to the door frame, leaned from his forward seat to thrust his head into the window of Gilda's and Arthur's compartment.

"All out for Lover's Lodge!" he called.

As the party, with the men uttering sibilant hushes of warning, and the girls giggling nervously, followed the bride and groom and master of ceremonies to the door of the house that sheltered the combined license clerk and justice of the peace, Gilda's fears returned to assail her. She felt very small and unimportant. She was like a child who finds himself swept adrift in the crowd of a railway station, whose trains depart for fearsome and unknown destinations.

A moment later a ludicrous figure standing in the open doorway appeared, and a sense of humor came to her rescue. She was conscious of a face staring at her, whose chief characteristic was a pair of square gold-rimmed spectacles astride a beaklike nose, above which was a broad expanse of gleaming, hairless dome, and whose lower extremity curved downward, seemingly to meet the caress of an outjutting tuft of whiskers. Below this was a hazy expanse of nightshirt flapping chillily about lean shins and carpet-slipped feet.

Fearing now that she might give way to hysterical laughter, she bit her lips to submerge her mirth, while Harry explained their mission. The night-robed apparition hid itself behind the door, murmured something about waiting a minute until he had time to change into his other clothes, and directed their way into the lighted living room.

Of what happened in the succeeding interim Gilda was never fully aware, until suddenly she felt the pain of a too-tight signet ring being forced upon her finger, and heard the justice say, "Until death do you part."

She had knowledge of an inward smile when, as if she were a spectator instead of a principal, she considered the triteness of the official's jocular addenda: "And may God have mercy on your souls." Still in a blanketing fog, her senses told her that the ceremony was over, that Arthur had taken her hands, was putting his arms around her, was pressing his lips to hers—

Then the earth reeled and rocked and time, persons and things were obliterated, save the oneness of themselves.

She awoke to the babble of voices all speaking at the same time, the girls telling her and each other how glad they were, and the men each insisting on being first to kiss the bride. Arthur was discovering that his knees had stopped trembling, and that his voice was still articulate. Now, flushed with achievement, he was violently shaking the justice's hand, and was bearing up bravely under the rain of congratulatory slaps upon the back.

Gilda was being diverted by the curious phenomenon of Dumplings—of her of the ready laughter and frothy “comeback”—now immersed in tears.

“What’s the idea?” demanded Harry Maghan, lapsing into the vernacular in his astonishment.

Dumplings gulped. “I’m crying—because I’m happy—” she responded. “I just thought how—how natural she looks.”

Then the ride homeward. The strategies, when they returned to the city, to escape from the others. The hushed hours of the false dawn, when they crept on tiptoe into Arthur’s home, stole through the lower hallway, and up the stairs. The crepitating hammer of her heart at the creaking of a loose board beneath their feet. The solitude as Arthur turned the key of the door behind him.

Mark Trevelyan glanced from his evening paper as Lorraine entered the doorway of the living room. She made a lovely figure, he thought, standing there in her informal dinner dress, a filmy thing of blues and black with glints of silver interwoven in the fabric. He noted with familiar pleasure how astonishingly she was like her mother, and smiled affectionately as she advanced toward him with outstretched hands.

“Dinner is served, Dad,” she told him. “You must be famished.”

With arms about each other the two moved into the dining room. Lorraine protestingly accepted the attention as Trevelyan motioned aside the butler and placed her in her chair. As he seated himself

beside her, they exchanged a smile of fellowship across the table, whose appointments gleamed softly in the penumbra of the shaded lights above.

But there was a foreboding of alarm in Lorraine's heart as she glimpsed the displeasure with which her father observed the vacant chair beside them.

"Where's that boy? Why isn't he here?"

"I don't know, dear," Lorraine answered. "He may not have finished dressing." She did not add that earlier in the afternoon the maid had told her that Mr. Arthur was still sleeping, with the door to his room locked against interruption.

Trevelyan turned impatiently to the butler.

"Have someone tell my son to hurry down," he instructed. Then to Lorraine:

"He's probably sleeping off the effects of another all night party. That's why he did not show up at the office today. I knew I was a fool to think he would keep his promise."

"But maybe there is some good reason," urged Lorraine.

"Reason? Nonsense! The boy is just a good-for-nothing! He is undependable, he is irresponsible, he is entirely worthless!"

At this moment the subject of Trevelyan's analysis opened the door of his room gingerly in response to the servant's summons.

"Tell father I will be there immediately," he said. He waited until the maid had disappeared and then beckoned to Gilda, who was standing wretchedly reluctant to meet the coming ordeal.

"We might just as well face the music now," he said. "We'll feel much better when it is over, and I know Dad will love you himself."

"But yesterday morning he would not even hear my name," she reminded him.

"Ah, but now your name is Trevelyan," Arthur replied. He kissed her again in answer to her returning smile of happiness.

Downstairs Trevelyan was finishing his tirade.

"It is my own fault," he observed to Lorraine. "Ever since the boy grew up I have let you wheedle me into overlooking his shortcomings. Had I been firmer all the time, he would be a man now, instead of a nincompoop."

The butler entered. Lorraine's warning glance checked Trevelyan with a further word unsaid.

In the foyer Arthur and Gilda loitered at the foot of the staircase. She put a restraining hand on his arm as he started to lead her to the dining room, and paused with explorative hand to make sure that no lock of hair was in disarray.

"Are you sure that I look all right?"

"You're wonderful!"

Arthur placed an arm around her and gently pushed her forward. There were a few feet of steps between them and the doorway, steps to be traversed with lagging feet and faltering courage.

Trevelyan fished for the last iced clam. He impaled the delicacy and was conveying it with expectant relish toward his mouth, when a sound at the doorway, not of the footsteps of one person but those of two, distracted him.

The last clam hung suspended, never to be devoured. Trevelyan's eyes bulged and his mouth, which had opened for the morsel, became a wider orifice with astonishment. The clam fork jingled on the plate.

Before him, at the farther end of the room, his amazed senses beheld his son standing bravely a little in the van, while with the young man, and clinging desperately to his hand, was that blonde young thing, the nobody who had been with Arthur at the time of the disgraceful milk-wagon affair. On their faces were entreating smiles, but he did not notice these.

The graceful phrase of introduction which Arthur had so carefully rehearsed now failed him. He tried to be the first to speak, but the moment of hesitancy lost him that tactical advantage.

"It's good of you to honor us with your presence at all," Trevelyan offered ironically. "It would be more considerate, though, if you were to let us know beforehand that you were entertaining guests. In view of your delightful informality, we can waive the introductions."

Trevelyan arose from his chair and was about to leave the room. Arthur's heart sank at the chill in his father's tone. The situation was fast becoming irreparable. He stepped forward impulsively before it should be too late.

"Wait, father!" he demanded. "Wait! This is my wife."

Trevelyan halted, stunned.

"Your wife? Impossible!" he exclaimed.

A RENCO PRODUCTION

AFTER THE BALL

"Wait, Father!" Arthur demanded. "Wait! this is my wife."





"It is not impossible. It is true," Arthur replied firmly, with anger rising at his father's curt reception of the news.

Trevelyan brushed past his son and confronted Gilda.

"Is this true?" he demanded.

Gilda looked at him staunchly.

"Yes."

"You—you are married to my son?"

"Yes!"

Trevelyan was stricken. Ideas were coming too rapidly.

"But what's your name?" he questioned. "Who are you?"

Gilda groped for a reply, but Arthur checked her.

"Wait, dear—I'll answer."

Then, turning to his father:

"I've told you—she is my wife. Before we married, her name was Gilda Gay. Now it is Gilda Trevelyan—Mrs. Arthur Trevelyan. Until she became my wife, Gilda was an actress. Now—"

"An actress! O good Lord!" Trevelyan groaned. "I suppose you were in the movies."

Gilda was not to remain silent.

"Yes, in the movies, as you say. I *worked* for my living—often from early in the morning until long hours at night."

Trevelyan grunted. He glowered at his son.

"And I suppose," he observed, "that you'd like to be an actor, too."

"He might do worse," retorted Gilda. Their tempers rapidly were becoming taut and fragile.

"Yes, he might," responded the father. "He probably has, and probably will."

"Father!" Lorraine had moved from the table and was maneuvering to quell the tempest she saw arising.

"Keep out of this!" Trevelyan warned her. He resumed his questioning.

"Let's get to the bottom of this. How long have you two been married?"

Arthur felt a premonition of what was coming next, but met the issue.

"Since last night—we all drove to Riverside."

Trevelyan, whose first impetuous rage had given way to a cold, grim anger, spoke with cutting irony.

"That explains why you didn't keep your word to come to work today. Your other affairs were no doubt too pressing."

Arthur shrugged. Goaded by the sting of his father's words, he was growing reckless of consequences. He replied flippantly.

"That's about it. You see, I'd had no experience at being married, and I overlooked the other minor details."

Lorraine, trying vainly to stem the flow of bickering, moved to Gilda's side. She was moved to sympathy for this pretty, appealing creature being subjected so harshly to the jarring ordeal at the inception of her new-found romance. Her hand slipped around Gilda's, to press it reassuringly.

Arthur's response made Trevelyan lose what still remained of patience. Still with deadly calm, he unleashed the venom of his invective. Thoughts,

phrases, formed to find an utterance that afterward was to bring a torturing regret.

The group stood poised, as an avalanche lingers immobile for a fraction of a second before its crash. Then—

Manlike, Trevelyan tried to blame this disruption of his home upon the woman.

"Let me congratulate you," he said to Gilda, "upon the success of your ambitions."

"Dad, you mustn't!" It was Lorraine speaking.

"Shall we negotiate, or have you a lawyer ready?"

"What can you mean?" Gilda could not believe that this situation which she had seen played before the camera was bearing down upon her.

"I mean a settlement, of course. What are your terms?"

"Oh, that is unjust! You are cruel! Surely you don't think—"

Trevelyan smiled.

"You are a credit to your profession. Your display of ability is admirable."

Lorraine seized at Arthur's upraised arm.

"Stop, father! You have no right!" he protested.

"No right!" Trevelyan interrupted. "You dare stand there and talk to me of right, when you bring this—this—"

"Be careful—even if you *are* my father—!"

"I beg your pardon!" Trevelyan lapsed into his incisive iciness. "I was about to say that when you brought this—ah—no doubt estimable young woman

into my house, you should have considered whether you had any right to a wife without means of supporting her."

"But of course I can support her."

"How?" Trevelyan raised a skeptical eyebrow.

"Why—why—well, I'll go to work. I'll come to your office tomorrow."

Arthur had stepped into the trap which his father vindictively had set for him.

"Ah—I see! You'll come to my office tomorrow! You'll come to my office now, after having been indifferent and impudent to my efforts to make a man of you! You'll go to work, after having laughed at work as something for your father and other plodding dolts to do! You'll support a wife, after having never supported yourself!"

"No! As a climax to your illustrious career as a rich man's profligate son, you join in an all-night carousal with your drinking companions, in the course of which you acquire a wife! You marry! Very good. You have a wife; support her, as you say. But don't come to me for aid. I warned you yesterday that I was giving you one more chance. I meant it! Now I'm through."

"Dad! Please—oh, please!" Lorraine interposed her body between the father and son, and with arms around her father's neck, tried to intercede. "Don't do something you'll regret. Give Arthur another chance."

Trevelyan ruthlessly removed her arms and held her from him. All his pent-up rage at seeing his dreams for his son dissolve like dew, all the impotent resentment at facing a situation he could not domi-

nate, shredded his nerves and his self-control. He neared the breaking-point.

"'Another chance!' You talk of chance—chance! What chance had I, when I worked, and worried, only to give him a 'chance' to make ducks and drakes of his life? I'm giving him his chance! Now let him take it, and go!"

"You wouldn't drive him away—?"

"I'll go!" Arthur checked his sister's plea. "Never mind, Lorraine—I'll go."

The boy, who had been standing with his left arm around his wife, half-swung her impetuously around. She stopped him.

"Wait, dear—let me go, instead."

On the surface of her thoughts was the insensate craving to be away—to be free from this place of harrowing emotions—

"No—if we go we'll go together!"

Arthur held his wife closer to him. He looked again at his father, who stood before him, stony and implacable.

"Dad, do you mean it?"

"Get out!" The older man was conscious of a paralyzing constriction of iron around his chest as he forced himself to hold to his word.

Arthur turned to go, but as he swung resolutely toward the door, there lingered a fleeting glimpse of his father's face, on which anger, determination, stubborn will and a heavy heartache were mingled. All the tenderness inherent in the boy moved him spontaneously, and he held out his hand.

"Dad," he pleaded chokingly, "anyway, can't we be friends?"

Trevelyan's lips moved. A convulsive tremor of passion and love swept over his face, but the will was not to be broken.

"Get out!"

"Very well."

Arthur yielded to the ultimatum, not daring to see his father again lest his own control be uprooted in a tornado of unhappiness. He walked with Gilda to the hallway door.

But the action of turning the knob, of opening the door and stepping aside to allow Gilda to pass through, again brought into his vision the others of his family whom he was about to leave. Motionless, as if congealed by the intensity of his wrath, Trevelyan still stood watching his son depart. Beside him was Lorraine, mute, anguished, aghast at the wreckage of the mansion over which she had been chatelaine since childhood.

The eyes of the sister and brother met. Involuntarily, in response to the unspoken appeal each saw in the other's face, their arms were extended. There was a staccato sound of running feet across the polished floor, and Lorraine threw herself into Arthur's embrace.

"My dear! My dear!" she murmured. "How can we be apart?"

"I've got to, dearest," the boy replied. "There is nothing else to do."

To Trevelyan, watching coldly, the tragic farewell seemed an affront.

"Lorraine!" he ordered. "Come here!"

Lorraine lingered for a last little interval.

"You'll let me hear from you always?" she begged.

"Always!" Arthur pledged.

They held each other closely, for a time that seemed all too short. Then the boy forced himself away.

Trevelyan, with unseeing eyes filled with tears, heard his son's footsteps pass beyond the doorway. The door closed. The latch clicked. And Trevelyan, broken in grief, dropped his head upon his chest.

## CHAPTER VI

GILDA disconsolately looked up from the magazine she had been perusing to while away the time. She glanced at the walls of the combined living and bedroom, and noted with a little grimace of distaste how monotonously similar, with their overstuffed plush furniture and imitation mahogany, were the quarters of the endless number of hotels that make up New York's "Roaring Forties."

Her gaze fell upon the little traveling clock on the bureau. It was late—the hands marked an hour lacking only a few minutes of three o'clock. The jarring rumble of wheels of a passing "L" train crashed through the stillness of the night to recall her to worry why Arthur had not yet returned.

She gathered her negligee around her, rose, and crossed the room to straighten the odds and ends that littered the dressing table. Withered flowers in an imitation cut-glass holder were shouting for attention, and she discarded them. Different, this was, she thought, from the first days of her honeymoon. Then they had stopped at the newest and largest of the multiplex establishments that house a fair-sized city's population in the guise of a hotel. Then there were fresh flowers, not once, but several times daily, while phalanxes of maids, bell boys, clerks and other underlings anticipated any service she could imagine. This was for so long a period

as Arthur was "young Trevelyan, the son of the California oil millionaire" and his credit held good.

For to New York, drawn by its lure of opportunity—"where business is big—where the game is worth while—where a fellow has a chance to show what he can do"—Arthur had brought Gilda while still in the first golden glow of their high adventure. He was confident of the welcome awaiting him on the strength of his father's name, and in this he was not disappointed until he had tried to transmute his reception into terms of money making instead of money spending. Then came a rude awakening. Simultaneously came the necessity of a hurried telegraphic appeal to Lorraine for funds, and, when these were forthcoming, a rather depressing *bouleversement* in the shape of forced reduction of expenses and a change to other and cheaper quarters.

Now, the radiance of her romance slightly tarnished by the erratic manner in which Arthur was setting about to win fame and fortune, Gilda found herself back in another of the seemingly limitless procession of eminently respectable, but slightly shoddy, hotels which were the chief remembrance of her road-show days. It was discouraging; but she felt a mighty assurance that eventually Arthur would orientate himself and find a pathway through his labyrinth.

The door knob turned. Gilda swung eagerly toward the direction of the sound. Then her face became suffused with relieved happiness as she saw Arthur standing in the room.

He was in evening clothes. A trace of cigarette ash lingered upon the sleeve of his dinner coat, and

his collar did not quite survive immaculately the ordeal of the evening. There was an indefinite aroma of stale tobacco smoke mingled with the fumes of Scotch that clung to his clothes, but none of these Gilda noticed as, with a little inarticulate cry, she ran and threw herself into his arms.

Arthur's responses were not entirely spontaneous as she drew him to the lounge and seating him there, snuggled beside him. It was with forced cheerfulness that he told her how glad he was to be back with her again.

"I was so worried—I was afraid you had been hurt," she told him. "Couldn't you have phoned?"

"I thought you would be asleep and did not want to wake you," he answered.

There was a light suggestion of a frown as he spoke that Gilda did not notice, nor could she, unschooled in masculine perversity, divine his resentment at the tiny silken cords of obligation which he was beginning to feel wind irresistibly about him.

In an overflow of her renewed wonder at the miracle of their love, Gilda's next words also were incautious. Poor child—from her view-point there was no necessity for caution nor reason why she should weigh her words with one so dear.

"I missed you so much!" she lamented happily. "You've never been away from me so long."

Another strand of gossamer added to the web. Arthur's impulse was to brush it aside casually. Lightly, in an effort to ignore its existence, he replied:

"Well, I was longer at the club than I thought I'd be."

"Oh! Oh, Arthur! Again? When you knew that I was here alone waiting?"

She could have bitten off her tongue to recall her words. Instantly came appreciation that this was not the Gilda with whom Arthur had frolicked, carefree, in California. She saw now that he was in ill humor, had been so since his entrance, for this time his impatience was not disguised in his reply:

"Yes, again—why not? What of it? I've got to meet people if I'm to make business connections."

Instantly she was all contrition.

"Of course, dear—forgive me! I would not interfere for all the world."

Something in her generous acquiescence pricked at his conscience. He was only too well aware that it was not a business connection he had sought at the club. His victory over her was too easy for his self-esteem, and to salve his pride, he adopted the feminine strategy of putting the injured party on the defensive. Still trying to talk himself out of a bad situation he continued:

"I've got to get money somehow for the hotel bill. It was only a little game and it seemed easy."

He realized that his last phrase was a blunder, that he should have left well enough alone. With this knowledge came a wounded resentment at Gilda for having made it possible for him to weaken himself in his own mind. He became sullen, and, because he really was in love with her, sought balm for his own crippled dignity in an opportunity to relieve himself by hurting the thing he loved.

Through the tender mistiness of her thoughts of him came a worry forcing itself into her mind with

the insistence of a fire-alarm. She looked at him, startled at first, and then dismayed as she became aware of the word's significance. She repeated his phrase:

“Seemed easy?”

The inference struck home.

“*Seemed* easy?” she repeated. “Then you lost?”

Arthur nodded sulkily. His hand moved listlessly, as if to say: “What of it?”

Consternation came with his admission.

“What little we had?”

Again he nodded. Another fibre added to the mesh. He was in for it—might as well brush ruthlessly ahead. Maybe he could break down the web.

“What if I did? It's my money, isn't it, and my time?”

The harsh brutality of his callous response stung her from the lethargy of her first shocked surprise. She sprang to her feet and stood, more wretched than angry, facing him.

“Of course it's yours—but it's because I love you, and want you to do something, instead of wasting everything—your money, and your time, and what is most vital, the best that is in yourself!”

She paused, hoping that his next words would be reassuring. He failed to speak, and she continued:

“It's not that I care about the money you lost! You know that if I had enough, gladly would I give it all to you to do with as you wish!”

She checked herself and turned aside to stifle a tear, in order that he might not see her weep. Doing so, the plush and sham mahogany intruded to



AFTER THE BALL

A RENCO PRODUCTION

"Seemed easy?" she repeated. "Then you lost?"



repeat their dispirited reverie of one-night stands and the vagaries of that nomadic life.

"It is not the money," she repeated, pleading to be understood. "But I want a home, and shelter, instead of this day-to-day scramble."

Again Arthur's guilty knowledge insisted on relief. He found it in her plea and wilfully misinterpreted her thought.

"That is all you married me for—a meal ticket!" He threw the accusation at her viciously. "You thought you would get it through Dad—"

"Ah—don't! Don't!"

Like a friendly youngster who receives a rebuff when he expects a caress, Gilda stared round-eyed at him, in pitiable disbelief that this man of hers could so have struck at her. Then she seemed to shrink under the blow. She wilted. Only to hide her face from all the world and its misery. She sank to the lounge. Her head became buried in the pillows. Long, choked-up dry-eyed sobs struggled not to be repressed. She lay there, with Arthur sitting stolidly at her side, a wan little figure huddled in the corner, shaken and forlorn.

Arthur tried to nurse along his sense of injury, which was insisting, to an irritating degree, upon departing. Was he not responsible for their finances? Then what business was it of hers what he did with the money? Just like a girl, to make a fellow feel rotten when it was all her fault.

The vibration of her stifled sobs sent a slight tremor through the lounge and intruded on his consciousness. Why does a girl always have to cry?

She knows very well it is her strongest weapon.  
She doesn't play fair. . . .

The lounge shook again.

Well, he couldn't stand that. He rose. Aimlessly he paced the narrow confines of the room. He reached the dresser. He pottered with the objects upon it. He picked up a discarded collar. His supply of linen was running low. Somehow he would have to dig up money for some new stuff.

His fingers dallied with a little squat bottle. "Coeur de Jeunesse" read the label. He diverted himself by trying to remember his prep-school French. "Heart of a young girl"—silly phrase.

He looked toward the lounge. The sobs had subsided and she was lying inert. She had had a good cry, and now she was satisfied. Probably expected him to go over and pet her into forgiving him. He'd show her. . . .

A lip stick. A few hair pins. A box of face powder. He sniffed at it experimentally. There was a reminiscent something—a nostalgia of memory. Something lingered vaguely in the fragrance—difficult to place. Gilda—face powder—a jumbled impression of perfume of orange blossoms and of a motor humming its way between avenues of crimson ramblers—of a ride through the night. . . . The comfortable chugging of the taxi progressing toward its inevitable conclusion—a chariot of destiny. . . . . tender inarticulate murmurings—reassurances and pledges . . . . the indefinable mingling of memories and of recurrent sensory impressions. Queer, the subtle connection between the sense of smell and these remembrances. Orange

blossoms—he'd promised to be good to her. Well, wasn't he? A fellow can't do more than he can . . . . . funny, how a girl has to have so much junk around her. All these things on the dresser. Couldn't she get along as well without them? Useless stuff. . . . serve her right if he were to sweep it all helter-skelter into a drawer. Teach her to be orderly. This thing, now—what in the world was it good for?

He picked up the article and stared at it with tolerant amusement. It was an egg-shaped object of wood, from one end of which extended a handle. It was of a size to fit conveniently into a woman's hand. The end of the spheroid opposite the handle was mottled with countless tiny scars where a needle, in persevering but unpracticed fingers, had pricked through the shiny varnish.

He laid the thing back upon the dresser where he had found it. Beside it was a small black shapeless mass of woven silk. He picked it up. It was a sock. One of his own.

He crushed the fabric in his hand with a recurrent anger at her untidiness in having the thing there, instead of where it could be found conveniently with its mate. As his fingers pressed around the sock a sharp sting of pain caused him quickly to unclench them. Then he saw a needle, with its strand of darning floss still through the eyelet, where it had been placed until the work of repair should have been completed.

Then came recollection. It had been a long time since Arthur had seen his sister Lorraine, while she was still in smock and pigtail, mending his stock-

ings with the aid of a darning needle. He slid the egg into his sock, and inspected closely the yawning gap which his toe had worn through the fabric.

The half finished stitches engrossed his attention. They were painstaking, minute; but here and there the inexperience of their maker had skipped a strand. It was easy for him to imagine how Gilda had struggled with the task; how the yarn had become snarled and knotted in spite of her; how she had kept on, with eagerness, in knowledge of his scanty supply of clothing, to have a pair of freshly mended hose for him in the morning.

But it wasn't for someone to darn his socks that he had asked her to become his wife. He wanted a companion—a girl who could be a good fellow and keep up with the crowd, and not worry about tomorrow or the money. That was it: this money business. Probably she had been figuring she could save the expense of a new pair.

Maybe, after all, she was right. Possibly it *was* better to economize as she had urged. It was on her insistence that they had moved to this cheaper hotel, instead of taking the chance of being able to meet the bill at the other place. He knew she had had more experience in making both ends meet than he. Perhaps he *was* a fool—perhaps there was nothing to this business—a fellow lost in the long run.

He replaced the sock and its darning egg upon the dresser. Still no sound from the lounge. Perhaps she had fallen asleep, exhausted by the paroxysms of her weeping. Perhaps she was lying

there waiting—only waiting—with a misery of longing eating at her heart. Perhaps nothing mattered for her then but to be told that he loved her and that he did not mean what he had said.

He turned his attention from the little homely touch of domesticity presented by the sock upon the dresser and looked again at Gilda. She seemed so sweet—so beautiful—so lovable.

Then, as by a tidal wave, he was engulfed by a prompting of tenderness, of a masculine sense of protectiveness and of giving, that had made him first wish to avoid hurting her. Now he *had* hurt her. He remembered how Lorraine use to kiss his bruises.

He moved on tiptoe across the room. Possibly she really was asleep, he thought, so he was careful not to startle her into wakefulness. He kneeled carefully beside the lounge.

Her face, still concealed among the pillows, offered no means of access; but at the back of her neck, where a little golden tendril of hair had escaped from its companion locks in attractive disarray, an interval of bare white flesh appeared above the laciness of her negligee. Over this he leaned cautiously. Then he touched his lips gently to the curl.

Gilda steeled herself to remain quiet. It seemed too good to be true, that he did not hate her. She waited. The pressure of his lips came again, this time more firmly as he responded to the urge to hold her close to him and bring her back to happiness. She moved slightly. The lips were withdrawn.

She turned her face to look upward into his. Repentance, love, concern for her, were readable in his eyes.

"Did I wake you?" he asked softly.

"I wasn't asleep," she replied. Still she dared not put her expectancies to the test.

Then he sank lower beside the lounge. His arms passed hungrily around her waist, and he buried his face where slim throat and shoulder met.

"Dearest, dearest!" he begged. "Can you forgive me?"

Her hand patted his back in reassurance.

"I'm sorry, honestly! Tell me you forgive me!"

For answer she held him closer to her shoulder.

"I forgive you, of course! Only—"

"Only what, dear? I'm sorry, sorry truly."

"Only—only—what you said about—about your father—"

She fought against her reluctance to repeat the hideous phrase. "About your father and the meal ticket."

"But I didn't mean it, honey, I didn't! I just said that, because I was sore! Forgive me!"

"I know, dear, I know. It was all my fault."

"Shsh—it wasn't!"

"Yes, it was! I shouldn't have started it at first."

"You didn't start anything, Gilda, honey. It was *my* fault. I shouldn't have stayed out and played cards. But it's going to be different from now on—and tomorrow I'll really try to land a job. Honestly I will!"

"Oh Arthur! Will you really?"

"Yes, dear, I promise! I—I love you so!"

He clung to her in an intensity of emotion. Half crooning, half murmuring fragmentary phrases of sentiment and devotion, she rocked back and forth, back and forth upon the lounge, with his head pillow'd against her breast.

The Weaver at the Loom had heard, counterpointing the diapason of sound which is New York's lullaby, the little interlude in minors of Arthur's love nocturne. Now as the symphonial metropolitan discordance swelled to a crescendo of its major movement, the Weaver turned again to the warp and woof of the intricate pattern he was fashioning out of human lives. Into the web of the design a new strand of drab material was to mingle, with unexpected contrast to the brighter colors of his tapestry.

Not far from the makeshift home of Gilda and Arthur, near that part of the city where electric kittens, blazoned against the sky to play endlessly with their spools of silk, marked the focal point of Broadway's glamor, were the two whose destinies soon would be merged inscrutably with those of the young couple enjoying so keenly the poignancy of their first quarrel and reconciliation.

One of these turned his attention, at his companion's words, from the frieze of beer rings he was marking upon the wooden table with his glass. A frown of dissent made still more ill-visaged the

features which a Lombrosio, or a plain-clothesman from that headquarters of police ganglions known as "300 Mulberry Street," would have marked as belonging to the higher strata of the underworld.

Only the features themselves, however, betrayed the calling of their possessor or his companion; for except that possibly there was a shade too much of conservatism and caution in fabric, cut and color, their attire was indistinguishable from that of all the indiscriminate throng that flocked nightly to this roof restaurant atop one of the showiest of the downtown hotels.

It was in their diction, though, that they would have been set aside had any of the cognoscenti of police headquarters been there to hear. They spoke in an argot of their own; their conversation was replete with words apparently without syntax, which had an oblique meaning apparent only to themselves and to their kind. Names and phrases of obvious innocence had a sinister interpretation to ears properly attuned.

Translated, there was at least coherence and understanding in the words of him who set his stein aside and objected:

"You're all wrong, Murphy. It's too big a chance. We'd never get away with it."

Murphy, impatient at the other's misgiving, insisted to the contrary.

"Chance nothing!" he scoffed. "It's a soft lay, and there's nothing to it. All we got to do, Soapy, is to wait until the coast is clear."

"But what about the watchman?" Soapy reminded.

"That dead pan?" Murphy derided. "That frozen-face will be pounding his ear all night long. You know what them swell joints is like—the minute the boss gets in his limousine to go into town, the servants will either hit the hay or get busy keeping dates."

Soapy got the illusion to the watchman and his bed, but was still unsatisfied.

"You think it's a soft crib," he replied, "but cracking it isn't so easy as all that. There ought to be more of us."

"What! Split three ways? Haven't I told you, the more we pay, the harder the way? Just us two to swing it, Soapy."

Soapy's eyes glittered greedily. "What's the percentage?" he demanded.

"Percentage? There's only one percentage—fifty-fifty."

"It don't listen good," Soapy objected. "You talk like you gotta yen to go up the river."

"What? The Big House? Never! I've still to be a first timer," Murphy boasted.

"Yeah, that's still coming to you, all right, but I don't want to be in on it."

"I tell you there's not a chance. Listen—"

Murphy bent his head closer to Soapy's. With all the enthusiasm of one who is confident in the success of his ambitions, he outlined the details of his plan to his skeptical accomplice, and gradually,

as Murphy elaborated the enticing possibilities of the "lay" and mapped roughly the scene of operations with beer-moistened finger upon the table, Soapy's doubts reluctantly were put aside. There was a nod of tacit understanding. They were all set.

And the Weaver, snipping the drab-colored worsted from his skein, laid the yarn aside until the involved design should demand its use again.

## CHAPTER VII

IT was seven o'clock. From her bedroom window Gilda could catch a glimpse, over intervening roofs and between encroaching buildings, of the stately clock tower that was one of the city's landmarks. She counted each red flash, at the peak of the imposing marble shaft, from the lantern marking hours. Seven o'clock! Arthur was already overdue. In the streets below, the homeward subway rush had subsided. Belated dinner guests, and early ones hurrying to the theaters for their night's business of entertaining others, were scurrying along, antlike, upon the sidewalks and in taxis.

Early in the morning he had left her with the announced determination of hunting for a job, and of finding it, warm on his lips before his farewell kiss. His lateness in returning might mean two things: he had been unsuccessful—he had trudged wearily all day long without reward; or his quest had reached its goal and already he had placed his foot upon the ladder.

There was a sound of footsteps in the hall beyond the door. Anxiously she yearned to learn the answer to her wonders.

In the hallway, out of sight of the descending elevator, Arthur paused while in the act of reaching for the door knob. Here was a tricky business. It would do no good, he reasoned, to let Gilda know

that it had been easier to wire Lorraine for funds, and to while away the intervening time before her answer came, than to visit employment agencies or seek tips on possibilities for work. Time enough for that tomorrow, especially since Lorraine's answer had provided sufficient money for immediate needs.

He drew a folded roll of banknotes from his trousers pocket. These he counted closely and divided into two amounts. The larger sum he secreted inside his vest, and replaced the remainder whence it came. Then he opened the door and stepped into the room.

Gilda, a flutter of orchid chiffon, precipitated herself toward him. He clasped her for a moment, and then held her at arms' length to drink in her loveliness.

"How beautiful you are!" he exclaimed. "I love you more than ever, in that dress."

"Do you remember it?"

"Let me see—" He pretended difficulty in placing it. "Let me see—haven't you worn it before?"

"Arthur! *Don't* you remember?"

"Now I know!" He laughed in boyish pleasure at the success of his strategy. "Of course I remember! The first time we met!"

He swept her again into his arms. Then looking downward into her upturned face he continued:

"But why all the glad rags?"

Gilda smiled bravely.

"It was a lucky dress for me—I had a hunch—I

thought maybe if I wore it tonight I would hear good news."

"Good news?"

"Yes—I hoped—Oh, Arthur! Did you get it?"

"Get what? What do you mean?"

"The position! Did you get it? I wore the dress so we could celebrate, if you did."

"Well—" Arthur was in a dilemma. This was too precipitate. He groped for time.

"Well, I haven't actually been hired," he answered. "But I am to meet a man at the club who has promised me a job tomorrow."

Gilda drooped at mention of the club. Instinctively she was aware of the enmity of this masculine institution to the tranquillity of the conjugal edifice she was trying to erect. Arthur noticed that her spirits sagged, and was prepared, as a result of his maneuver in the hallway, for just such an emergency. He placed a hand in his trousers pocket for the smaller portion of his money and exhibited it to her, saying:

"See! This isn't a loan. It's an advance against the commission I am going to make."

Gilda brightened. It wasn't the money, primarily. It was its offer of surcease from pressing worries that cheered her. She made no move to take it, but as he returned the roll to his pocket, she asked eagerly:

"Now can we pay the hotel bill?"

Arthur nodded.

"Of course—and have plenty besides."

"Really plenty?"

Arthur nodded again. His reassurance brought to her a promise of fulfillment of the wishes she had cherished. Glowing with a bounding hope she continued:

"Then tomorrow, while you are looking for your job, I can look for a real home! We'll move from here—we'll get an inexpensive little flat, where I can do our cooking, and your laundry, and things! We'll have our own home!"

The idea almost overcame her, but still she nestled it close to her, letting it expand and grow with the warmth of her longing. As if to satisfy herself by hearing her conclusions spoken aloud, she elaborated:

"Oh, Arthur! Think! Our own place! We'll be happy ever after, like I used to read in the fairy books. And *I'll* work, too!"

Arthur placed a finger in negation against her lips. He shook his head masterfully at her suggestion that she contribute to the nebulous family income. Not he. Not he to let his wife work. If he wasn't man enough to support her, why—

"Oh, but just for a while, at first, until you are firmly on your feet," she persuaded. "Of course, after awhile I might not be able—"

"You darling!"

He clasped her closer to him, but she withheld herself for an interval.

"Please, just at first?" she begged.

"I don't know—perhaps, just at first." Arthur magnanimously allowed himself to be wheedled into consent.

So much for that. His tactics were proving themselves admirably. Now for a flank movement, and the victorious skirmish of the finale.

"Lord! I nearly forgot!"

His manifest agitation as he glanced hastily at his watch impressed her. Questioningly she drew apart to wait his explanation.

"I am so sorry," he told her. "You see, I've got to meet this man to see him about the job. He's probably waiting now. I've got to hurry."

"Oh—then we won't have dinner together?"

"You know I'd love to, dear, but I can't. This is important. It means everything. We'll celebrate tomorrow night, instead."

"Oh!"

"Never mind, honey. We'll make up for it."

Tremors of misgivings assailed her. "Arthur?" she asked.

He stopped in the act of searching in a drawer for a dress shirt, and looked at her.

"Arthur, you're not going to play cards again?"

"Silly! Certainly not!"

He thrust his hand into his trousers and withdrew a roll of bills, around which he pressed her fingers.

"See! Now you've got all the money, so I can't play, even if I wish."

Only half appreciative of what he had done, her mind held to the major theme.

"You promise?"

"I promise!" He held his hand extravagantly aloft in confirmation of his words.

"But I must hurry!"

He rummaged over the surface of the dresser.  
“Gilda, will you help me with this tie?”

Soapy loitered in the shadows of the service area-way. Serving as a prop to his back, the walls of the Sloane residence sprawled generously over the grounds, one of the show-places of Long Island. Their white-stuccoed surfaces, the red-tiled roofs that mounted them to combine in a hybrid Moorish-Spanish Mission architecture which is peculiarly of modern America, gleamed theatrically beneath a too-perfect moon.

It was the brilliancy of this moon that worried Soapy. Too sharply revealing were the rays which even in the purple pools of the shadows betrayed his features. His eyes, close set, narrowed to weasel pin-points. His lips compressed themselves still more thinly; and his ears, lobeless and low-placed, drew upward with the intensity of his disgust.

For inside the house, despite all that Soapy had argued in dissuasion, was his partner, Three-Finger Murphy. Vainly Soapy had urged the discretion of waiting a night when the whole works would not be lit up like Broadway. Murphy's retort had been that the Sloane job was going begging for attention, and that no one ever cashed in with the fence by waiting.

Soapy spat venomously.

“The bull-headed stiff!” he muttered. “Serve him right if I did out-smart him.”

The rattle of a taxi conveying some reveler

tardily homeward broke Soapy's thoughts. His figure stiffened, furtively alert. Then as the cab cruised past the ornamental gateway at the entrance to the grounds, he relaxed again. Near that gateway, he knew, was their own car, ready for a getaway.

The silvery play of the moonlight dimmed as if tarnished with an unseen brush. The echoes of the retreating taxi became muffled, opaque; and glancing, Soapy permitted himself the luxury of a smile as he watched a fog bank, inblown from the Atlantic, engorge the moon.

From beyond the areaway came the faint sibilance of a rubber sole caressing the cement path. Murphy, returning from his foray, was approaching, confident in the fidelity of his lookout. Murphy had never studied character analysis. He had never even heard of it. But then, Murphy was not an intellectual.

As the scuffle of the shoe sounded its warning, the gleam of avid cunning returned to Soapy's eyes. Still merging his outlines in the encloaking shadow, he peered carefully at his accomplice. With hungry satisfaction he observed the faint oblongs of the satchel in Murphy's grasp. Then he drew back noiselessly.

"Serve him right," he repeated to himself. "I told him it wasn't his night."

The other housebreaker, welcoming the increasing density of the fog, came nearer. About here, he figured, he would find Soapy. Then for a quick, smooth getaway, and then—

His thoughts, reflecting the peculiar jingling jargon from Australia which had been taken up by his set, reverted to the twist and twirl, that's the girl—

Soapy's fist clenched. When Murphy's unshaven jaw came in range, the blow was launched. It reached its mark. Behind it was a strength oddly contrasting with Soapy's apparent weakness. Murphy sagged, his knees doubling under him with comic abandon, and he went to sleep.

Gone now was caution. One glance assured Soapy that there was no need to repeat the attack. He grabbed eagerly at the satchel. It was heavy; comfortingly so. Murphy's fingers uncurled limply from its handle. Soapy straightened, cuddled the satchel securely under his arm, and ran. The fog helped obscure his flight across the velvety lawn. The gateway yawned invitingly for his exit. He leaped into the car parked at the side of the road. There was a grinding of gears, and then the crash of the motor exhaust curdled the fog blanket as he sped toward New York and safety.

Like the rattle of a stick drawn rapidly along a paling fence, the reverberations of the departing motor seared into Murphy's tortured brain, struggling back to consciousness. He staggered to his feet. His hand groped to his bruised jowl, and his swarthy face wrinkled as with pained dismay a surprised impression came.

"And me, that learned him how to land a punch!"

Then dawning realization banished the self-pity. Already the sound of the motor was dying in the distance. With it was going all hope of celebration with his moll.

Murphy sped across the lawn, fleet for all his lumbering bulk. Beyond the gate stretched the Babylon highway. To the right, Murphy knew, Soapy was well on his way to the city. If only, now, he had that car—

As if in answer to his wish, the beam of a spotlight pierced the mist and flickered momentarily on a poplar. Murphy dodged out of its zone as a racing model roadster, with one occupant, rounded a bend in the highway and approached the Sloane estate.

A sudden gust of wind swept across the road, ripping the fog blanket. Murphy, watching anxiously, saw the driver's hat lifted from his head and swirled to one side. There came a screech of brakes, the speedster halted, and its driver leaped out to retrieve his hat. Murphy ran forward. In the faint illumination of the tail light the two figures met, sketchily smeared with the red rays. A gasp of alarmed surprise on the driver's part, the impact of two blows with all of Murphy's weight behind them, and then the driver's figure lying on the asphalt. A second more, and the dwindling blood-shot eye of the tail-light winked derisively at the astonished autoist as the fog lowered.

The last round of roodles—"to give the losers a chance"—had been played. The banker shoved the deck of cards to one side, and called upon the players to cash in their chips. Systematically he summed up the money in "the bank," and turned to the heav-

iest winner to exchange that player's counters for cash.

Arthur, slumped low in his chair, with a half-emptied highball glass dangling in his hand, gazed dully around the card-room. A slight headache gnawed annoyingly at the continuity of his thoughts. His eyes smarted, stung by the pungency of the smoke-laden air. The few English sporting prints which the house-committee of the club had placed upon the buff-toned walls, danced a rigadoon when his glance tried to focus upon them.

His free hand toyed idly with the chips remaining in front of him. They were too few in number to be worthy the dignity of a stack. A red one, a few whites. They clicked together between his nervous fingers.

The player at Arthur's right shoved his stack across the baize-covered table. Use of both hands was necessary to accomplish the transfer of the bulky winnings. Red, blue and white were massed in orderly colors, with an appreciable showing of yellow chips of higher denomination. Here was the heavy winner of the night.

"Cleaned up, didn't you?" observed the banker of the game.

"Oh, a little—enough to make up for last night's losings," deprecated the winner.

"Some people never know when they're lucky," complained the man at Arthur's left. "I don't mind losing; but I hate to sit all night and never get a hand."

The stereotyped phrases ricochetted against the shell of introspection which Arthur had built around

him. Only vaguely he heard the winner, in good-humored raillery, mock at the other speaker's plaints.

"It's music to the gambler's ears, to hear the loser squeal," chanted the winner.

Arthur counted his chips. The red was worth a dollar. Two, three white ones—seventy-five cents. In all, one seventy-five—all that was left of the money Lorraine had sent him. It was a good thing, he remembered, that he had given Gilda some of the fund, even though it had been the smaller amount. He looked upon it now as a conservative precaution, rather than as a ruse toward her deception.

He tossed the chips toward the banker. There was a jingle of silver in exchange.

"Better luck next time," commiserated the banker.

Arthur nodded, and rose. He murmured something of a good night. Still numb with the blow of the disastrous outcome of his venture, he found his way somehow downstairs, through the lobby of the club, past the cloak-room, and into the street. A few steps carried him from the club to the corner of the side street and Fifth Avenue.

The freshness of the night air recalled him to his senses and swept away the fuzziness of his thoughts. There had been a rain. The avenue, deserted except by a few late wayfarers, stretched invitingly up-town, with its globes of light reflected in the wet paving like twin diamond necklaces upon a velvet cloth.

As he strode aimlessly toward Central Park, reproaches and incriminations flashed sharply through his brain. What an asinine figure he had cut, he told himself. And what an imbecile he had been,

to believe that if he tried "just once more," his luck would change and allow him to beat the game!

Fool! "Father was right"—and he smiled mirthlessly at the pat appropriateness of the catch-phrase. He scourged himself with rebukes, words and phrases lashing his spirit into self-humiliation. What right had he to suppose that he had it in him to make something of himself, as he had set out so grandiosely to do? Yes, Father was right. He was just a ne'er-do-well.

The park entrance opened invitingly when he reached the Plaza. He swung past the St. Gaudens equestrian statue of Sherman, and through the portals. A path wound beckoningly into the shadow-shrouded mazes of the park. Here were solitude, seclusion, where he might submerge in the enveloping darkness the remorse that was dogging him.

The pathway turned sharply to the left, and he came upon a bench placed circumspectly under an arc-light. It offered repose. His footsteps lagged, and a great weariness came upon him. He sank down to the bench, slouched himself lower so that his head found a resting-place against the back, and extended his legs, sprawling, in front of him—a study in black and white of evening dress against the somber background of foliage.

Across a depression in the landscape, beneath another arclight, he saw the figure of a lounging park policeman—a "sparrow-cop," he remembered they were called. His gaze lingered on the policeman—then he became aware of another figure nearer him; one equally familiar. It was the presence of his

remorse, mumbling again the excoriating condemnations.

“Waster! Profligate!” Yes, worse than that—“A liar, and a cheat!” He flagellated himself with the thought of Gilda’s contrasting trust and devotion, and of his betrayal of that trust. “Weakling!” That was worst of all; that he did not have the stamina to be otherwise.

A sable pond at the foot of the ravine blénded with the blackness of his thoughts. Despair swept over him. Of what use to carry on?

## CHAPTER VIII

MURPHY cursed, and jammed his brakes down hard. As the brake band bit in, the tires of the racer cried in shrill protest at the sudden cessation of the onward rush.

The momentum of the car carried it forward at first seemingly without diminution, and the driver peered anxiously around the glass windshield. He had caught a momentary glimpse of a red light bobbing ahead, and his gaze, piercing through the obscurity of the fog, confirmed his sense of danger. The car struck a wet patch upon the asphalt. The rear end skidded dizzily to one side, and the auto careened toward the ditch.

Murphy struggled with the wheel. He gave way to the side lurch, and then managed to straighten the auto in its course. There was a hair-breadth escape from crashing into the wagon of a huckster who was nodding sleepily over his reins, and then Murphy stepped on the accelerator again.

He rubbed hurriedly at the gathering moisture upon the windshield. Before him ran the ribbon-like boulevard of the Babylon highway. Somewhere beyond the farthest point illuminated by his headlights, he knew, was Soapy.

Beyond was Soapy, and his precious treasure trove. Still further beyond lay New York, with its labyrinth of streets, its bee-hive of buildings, its

thousand and one places of sanctuary where the fugitive might laugh in security against Murphy's pursuit. Above all, it was necessary to overtake the car ahead before Soapy reached his destination.

Beside the driver roared a panorama of ghostly trees, telephone poles and dwellings, rushing upon him for a brief space of illumination in the beams of his lights, then being left swiftly behind to oblivion.

At fifty, sixty, sixty-five, seventy, the needle of the speedometer paused to note the driver's speed. Still Murphy tried further to urge the finely-tuned motor.

"I'll catch him, if I have to break my neck!" he vowed.

Stark white in the ray of the searchlight, a traffic sign raised a warning arm aloft. A huge "S" painted on the boards told of the trap that lay ahead. He shut off the gas. Too late—already he had swung into the first of the curves.

The smell of rubber burning under heavy friction was left behind as Murphy's reckless handling of the brakes checked the speed of the car. The vehicle skittered around the bend. The wheels on the inner radius of the roadway rose perilously from the ground. Murphy was stricken with a sinking sense of his dependency upon the unknown quantity lying in the strength of the outer wheels. Then the car settled again and was upon the other curve.

By good fortune instinct guided him. At that precise moment which professional racing drivers have learned to know so well, he "gave her the gun" just as the car seemed doomed to crash through a line of fence-posts. There was a shower of dust

and gravel as the off wheels slid from the paving into the dirt, and then he was upon the fairway again.

For mile after rushing mile he rocketed through the landscape. Farm yard dogs scarcely had time to raise a resentful bark before he had passed out of sight.

Once, where workmen had been repairing the road, a sharp detour rose instantaneously ahead. He had no time to turn. The car bounced and jolted over ploughed-up surfacing, and his wrists grew numb with the strain of holding the wheel within his tortured grasp.

Once there was a metallic tinkle as he grazed the side of an auto parked beside the road, its occupants too immersed in their own affairs to be aware of how near they were to continuing their idyl in eternity.

And at the long end, when Murphy was being torn with fear that Soapy had taken a more circuitous route, he was rewarded by the sight of a blinking tail-light as it topped the rise of a hill ahead and then disappeared.

"I've got him!" Murphy exulted. "I'll teach him —the double-crosser—!"

He boomed toward the top of the hill, the powerful engine increasing its speed in spite of the sharp ascension. At the crest the fog had lifted. Where the roadway dipped downward again, Murphy gained a clear view. At the foot of the grade he caught a glimpse of Soapy's speeding car, thrown into bright relief secondarily by the headlight of an

onrushing electric train across whose tracks the highway ran.

Murphy dropped like a plummet down the grade. The electric train entered a signal block, and the automatic bell at the grade-crossing began a clamor of alarm, while at the same time the crossing gates lowered themselves like long white arms across the right-of-way. But Murphy did not try to decrease his speed.

The motorman in the van of the train, catching sight of Murphy's approach, pulled hysterically at the whistle cord. The airbrakes of the train were thrown on with an abruptness which jolted passengers from their seats. Sure that a crash was inevitable, the motorman could only hope that the momentum of the train would be lessened sufficiently to save the foolhardy driver's life.

Only imperceptibly checked, the train was almost upon the crossing, with Murphy and his car but a few rods beyond the tracks. The motorman's whistle shrieked once more despairingly, and the heavy steel line of coaches dashed across the road.

Just as the last car had cleared the crossing there was a splintering of wood as the metal projectile of Murphy's car struck the crossing gates. Fragments of the barriers hurtled through the air. Murphy, who had ducked low in the car at the moment of impact, wiped away a stain of blood where a sliver of the shattered windshield had brushed his cheek. He had not slackened speed. The engine still roared its gloating sense of power, and its driver responded to its call. The auto seemed intact so far

as running ability was concerned. That was all that mattered, except that the slight delay again had given Soapy a lead. Dogged in his determination to nullify this loss, Murphy settled to the monotony of his pursuit.

He was entering the outskirts now of Long Island City. The dwelling places were becoming more frequent as he shot past the shabby structures that dotted, like a sporadic rash, the territory beyond the city's fevered center. Again for an instant he had a vision of Soapy's car, this time appreciably nearer. Meteorlike he blazed his way through the deserted avenues.

The approach to Queensborough Bridge. The agonizing necessity of slackening speed, lest a traffic policeman by coincidence be awake to halt him with a fusilade of shots into his tires. Below the gossamer span of the bridge, the dark outlines of Blackwell's Island in the East River.

Murphy had hoped never to be so close to the penal institution on the Island; and in the same manner in which a drowning man is said to rehearse the lightning flashes of his life, so Murphy, diverted by the thought, found amusement, in the hurly-burly of the chase, by picturing the astonishment of the prison officials on the Island if he were suddenly to swerve through the bridge railing and crash down, uninvited, among them.

The thought diverted him so long that he had barely time, at the Manhattan end of the bridge, to avoid being hurtled into Paradise by the imminence of a collision with a motor fire engine. He shivered at the narrowness of his escape, not from death, but

from being placed under arrest for obstructing the passage of the fire-fighting apparatus. This was no time to indulge in diplomatic discourse with a policeman.

But at this stage of the game of hare and hound, Soapy also was finding his way impeded. Despite the lateness of the hour, the traffic of heavy-laden trucks, conveying the multitudinous necessities which the metropolis daily draws from the rest of the world to feed upon, was still so thick that Soapy was forced to pick his way with care. But soon, he knew, he would reach Third Avenue where it crosses Fifty-ninth street. There he would swing southward, and be lost in the catacombs of the living that make up the city's lower East Side.

He indulged in a chuckle or two at the thought of Murphy's debacle. It had been a perfect getaway. Nothing had marred the success of the scheme which had come as by inspiration while he was waiting for Murphy on the grounds of the Sloane estate. Pretty smooth, he thought; and with the necessity for intensive attention to his driving no longer pressing, he permitted himself the luxury of a sideways glance at a girl upon the sidewalk, some late worker returning to her home.

Fastened to the left-hand side of the auto windshield was a searchlight, pivoted upon a bracket. On the side of the light opposite the lens, placed in such position as to give the driver a tell-tale view of the road behind him, was a concave mirror. Soapy's eyes, trying vainly to catch an answering gleam in those of the girl, caught instead a glint of light in the silvered surface of the mirror.

It was a momentary annoyance, and he closed his eyes in automatic reaction to the flash. Yet something in the field of vision encompassed by the mirror lingered in his mind. He looked into the mirror again, this time sharply. Behind him, being driven as rapidly as its lone occupant dared, was a racing car that looked the worse for wear. Beyond the place where the windshield should have been were the driver's outlines, outlines dismayingly familiar.

Soapy gulped. The hair prickled on the back of his neck. He remembered what Murphy once had told him: "There's only one thing to do with a double-crosser, and that ain't the half of what 'ud happen to anybody that 'ud try to gyp me."

And here was Murphy close behind him, and his getaway ruined at the moment of its conclusion! He dared not turn so quickly to the haven he sought—as quickly as he had planned.

Murphy, with the lust of the stag-hound closing upon its prey, risked arrest and accident as he quickened his pace to overtake Soapy and end the pursuit. A block, two blocks, and then he would force Soapy, at the point of a gun, to the curb. There would be a report or two, similar to the backfiring of a motor exhaust, and then Murphy would be free to keep his rendezvous with the twist and twirl.

Here the Weaver at the Loom interrupted the shuttle in its motion to introduce a subsidiary figure in the design. Where the flowing arteries of the city intersect at Third and Fifty-ninth, he drew a construction train, along the street-car tracks, across the trail. To complete his pattern's mystic purpose, he allowed Soapy first to pass beyond the

intersection. Murphy, though, the Omnipotent One halted in mid-pursuit. In the weft and warp of the web, the tangled threads were still to run.

When the train had jolted slowly out of his way, Murphy's motor leaped ahead; but Soapy's car again was dwindling in the distance, and Murphy was broken-hearted. Only by a miracle, he feared, could he retrieve the advantage lost by the disastrous jest of circumstance.

Through the long blocks of the cross streets cutting through the avenues went quarry and pursuer. Soapy, dividing his watch between Murphy in the mirror and the pathway ahead, grew still more panicky as he saw that the car behind him was overtaking him. There was no time now to maneuver for an escape by dodging through the grid-ironed streets. He glanced around in desperation, like a fox cornered with the pack at its heels.

The St. Gaudens statue of Sherman rose abruptly ahead, like a landmark, to tell his shattered nerves that the park was close at hand. Here was refuge; a place of shadows, of hidden by-ways, and of twisting paths where Murphy no longer would have the advantage of a faster car, and where he might shake off his Nemesis.

Hastily he swerved in his course and swung up the avenue. The Fifty-ninth street entrance was too public a place at which to abandon his car and dart through the park gateway. Ahead, he knew, was a pedestrian entrance, and toward this he sped.

At the next street he was forced anew to lose time by swinging his car around to face downtown with the traffic. The operation brought him beside

the curbing, with the footpath entrance beyond the sidewalk. He stopped his motor; left the car to be found by its owner; reached to the floor of the car for the bulky satchel for which he had risked so much, and ran into the park.

## CHAPTER IX

ARTHUR TREVELYAN laughed at himself for having considered the park lake as a solution to his difficulties. Somewhere, he remembered, he had read that it is only youth that takes itself so seriously as to seek suicide to escape troubles. He was glad, he told himself, that he had enough sense of humor to see the absurdity of his notion.

With the veering weathercock of his thoughts came a brighter outlook. His processes of the future seemed ridiculously simple. He rehearsed just what he would do—go home, confess to Gilda his deceptions and unworthiness, cajole her into forgiveness, and tomorrow get that job in earnest. Heretofore, he knew, he had only been trying half-heartedly. It was nonsense, he argued, to suppose that in this city of six millions there was no opportunity for a man of his advantages.

With decision came action. He rose to his feet from the park bench, stretched himself to start his blood pulsing again through his cramped legs, and started to straighten his attire so that Gilda would not think he had been on a carousal. His hand was upon his tie—and then he paused.

Nearby someone was running, hurrying along a pathway. The sound of the quickened footsteps grew louder. Whoever was making use of the park for a midnight race-course was approaching in his

direction—probably along the same path, since it was the only one in close vicinity. Some high school youngster, he surmised, training for a miniature Marathon. He adjusted his tie and stooped to regain his walking-stick from the ground where it had fallen.

Nearer came the sounds of the runner. There was something sinister, stealthy—not the free, long strides of one merely seeking exercise. He drew back into the shadows. Now he could hear the runner panting, gasping for breath.

The next moment Soapy, carrying the satchel, swung around the bend in the pathway and into the play of light upon the pavement. He was glancing backward over his shoulder in dread of the fearsome avenger pursuing him, and at first, as he entered, did not notice Arthur.

The glare of the illumination confused and startled him. He was a shining mark, he knew, for a chance shot, should Murphy be near enough to see him. Cursing at this trick of chance, he plunged into the shadow, and collided suddenly with Arthur.

Both men were jarred and shaken by the unexpectedness of the encounter. Soapy lurched backward, his hand groping toward his shoulder-holster.

“Wot t’ell?” he demanded. He started in amazement at the whiteness of Arthur’s shirt and the unaccustomed spectacle of a man in evening dress lurking in the darkness of Central Park at midnight.

Arthur’s demeanor convinced Soapy that there was nothing to fear, at least, in this quarter. He was about to resume his flight when an idea oc-

curred. Perhaps, by a trick, he might throw Murphy off his trail.

He pulled out his hand from beneath his coat. The next moment Arthur found himself staring into the muzzle of a revolver of business-like size and menace.

"Put 'em up, quick!" Soapy ordered.

Arthur was too amazed at the quickness of the hold-up immediately to comply. Soapy punctuated his command by jabbing the gun against Arthur's ribs.

"Come on—up with the mits! And don't try any funny business!"

Arthur raised his arms upward. This was a fitting finale to the evening's fiasco, he observed mentally, and he grinned back at Soapy's scowling countenance.

"You're too late, old top," he advised Soapy. "The others beat you to it."

"Never mind the gab," Soapy growled. He dropped the satchel at his feet, and ran his free hand swiftly over Arthur's body. When he had assured himself that Arthur was carrying no weapons, he stepped backward a pace.

"Now take 'em off," was his instruction.

"Do—what?" Arthur could not believe what he had heard.

"Take 'em off—get out of the glad rags."

Ideas were coming too rapidly for Arthur's comprehension. His puzzled expression forced Soapy to explain.

"We're swapping clothes—see? I'm going to a swell blow-out and I'm in a hurry! Come on—climb out!"

"But—but what will I have left to wear?" queried Arthur as he began to shed his dinner-coat.

"That'll be all right—I'll lend you mine," Soapy volunteered. Carefully he placed the satchel between his feet, keeping Arthur covered the while, and began to exchange the nondescript apparel, which he had donned for the night's business, for Arthur's immaculate attire.

At this moment Murphy, who had almost given up hope of overtaking Soapy, was forced to check his pursuit at the point where the Avenue and Fifty-ninth street cross. As he waited for the intervening traffic to pass he glanced anxiously up and down the famous thoroughfare. A block or two north he observed the dim outlines of a car resembling that which he had been pursuing. On the off-chance that his guess was correct he turned rapidly and sped toward it.

Yes, he saw, here was Soapy's car, left where its driver had run from it. Close by was the entrance to the foot-path leading into the park. Murphy knew the direction which one following the path must take. To pursue Soapy along that would be to run into almost certain ambush. Better to drive beyond, enter the park at the bridle path ahead, and double backward along the way—heading off Soapy's escape. He swung around a slowly moving bus, reached the equestrian drive, jumped from his car, and ran noiselessly along the soft dirt road.

Soapy now, forcing Arthur to play the role of valet, was slipping into the commandeered dinner-coat. He surveyed his stolen finery with satisfaction. The garments fitted well enough. Once away from this vicinity, he was sure that if Murphy were to see his outlines in the distance, he would remain unrecognized.

He concealed the satchel beneath the dinner coat, lest its presence betray him. Swinging Arthur's walking stick in his hand, he started to leave, then paused for a parting word of advice:

"Now don't get gay and try to follow me, or—"  
He waved the gun for emphasis, then ran.

Arthur, bewildered at his loss of raiment, gazed wildly about for the policeman he had seen earlier in the night. The officer was not in sight. He started to run after Soapy, disregarding the other's warning, but the chilliness of his bare knees reminded him that he was ill-prepared either for pursuit or observation. Quickly he retraced his steps, and began donning Soapy's cast-off clothes.

Soapy, yards farther along the path, trotted furtively, taking advantage of the soft turf that rimmed the pavement, in order that his footsteps might be muffled.

He reached the intersection of the walk and a bridle path. He paused, undecided whether to go farther into the recesses of the park, or to swing back to the streets again and profit by his masquerade in Arthur's clothes.

He chose the latter course. His feet made no sound along the driveway, softened by the churning

of many hoofs. He advanced more confidently now; then stopped, frozen into immobility with fear. Ahead, so near that the sound was like a thunder-clap, a twig had snapped under pressure of a foot.

He faded, rather than moved, into the protection of a clump of rhododendron that lined the drive. He was being stalked. He knew it, and even his pounding heart seemed in a conspiracy to betray him to his hunter, so drumlike were its beats.

Murphy, merged in the silhouette of a tree trunk, had seen Soapy approach. He had raised his gun at first glimpse, in wary alertness to send home without quarter the one shot that would avenge his companion's treachery. But he had been incautious; his foot had moved in the litter of the underbrush, and now his target had disappeared among the shadows.

Neither man dared make the first move. Each knew that to be exposed for an instant meant death. Catlike, each crouched, waiting. The furry darkness was at once an ally and a trap.

Soapy's throat tickled. He tried to swallow, but his muscles were atrophied. Soon he must cough, scream, anything to end the impossible tension. Murphy, stolid, self-contained, coldly weighed each possible move in the desperate game.

And then he acted. Cautiously, gently, inch by inch, he lowered his left hand to the ground and groped noiselessly on the turf. His fingers touched the cold hard outlines of a stone. With equal care he lifted it, poised its weight for a second in his hand, then hurled it toward the shadow into which he had seen Soapy disappear.

The missile swished through the shrubbery. It snapped off a rotted branch and fell to earth. Soapy's jangled nerves gave way. The ruse had done its work. Hysterically, in an ecstasy of terror, he fired wildly into the darkness. Twice, three times, his fingers pressed the trigger of his revolver. Each time the gold and purple spurts of flame marked only too well the position of his body behind the gun.

With the first powder flash, Murphy was poised, alert. His gun was levelled at the unseen target. The second flash revealed behind it a pallid face twisted with terror. Murphy shifted his aim a degree—a little to the right of the jetting fire, and a little below the face. When the third explosion came, he fired in return.

On the heels of the echoing report there was a faint cough, a sigh, and the soft thud of an object sinking inertly to the earth. Then—silence.

Murphy had heard that sound before. He knew that Soapy was not capable of simulating so cleverly the death-throe of a man hit vitally. Not too carefully now, sure of the accuracy of his aim, he approached the thing he knew was lying beneath the rhododendrons.

He knelt and groped. There, where the dead man's hand still clenched its handle, Murphy found the satchel. He lifted it. It was still heavy—then Soapy had not disposed of the loot. He rose and ran, back in the direction from which Soapy had come.

Arthur Trevelyan was buttoning the last of his enforced raiment when the stuttering sound of the

four revolver shots volleyed across the park and echoed against the apartments lining the avenue in the distance. He was arrested in midaction. Indecision overcame him, doubt whether to seek the streets and safety, or to advance in the direction of the reports. His mind connected unerringly the shooting with the astounding episode of the marauder who had robbed him of his clothes.

And as he paused, there came again the sound of running feet along the pavement; accelerated steps again advancing toward him, but this time from the direction of the fusillade. He threw discretion aside. Partly to halt the obvious fugitive, but principally to regain the evening clothes that would be so hard to replace, he leaped from the obscurity of the shrubbery onto the path. The following instant he and Murphy found themselves tussling in each other's embrace.

Arthur was conscious only of a gleaming weapon in his opponent's hand—a polished menace that he seized and clung to with tenacious frenzy. The strength of the other, as Arthur struggled to retain his hold, swung him off his feet. He slipped, fell, sprawled on the ground, but still his fingers were locked around Murphy's wrist.

Murphy was pulled to the earth also by the weight of Arthur's body. Over and over the two rolled, Murphy cursing vehemently at this intruder who had stopped his flight when the coast seemed clear.

The two rolled from the grass upon the pavement. Arthur's face was sharply illumined by the beams of the light. Murphy, in shadow, could not place the features. They were not those of a member of any

rival mob, nor yet of a plainclothes flatty. Arthur closed his eyes as Murphy swung aloft the satchel and brought it flail-like down upon his adversary's head.

Stung and spurred to superhuman effort by the blow, Arthur tensed his torso and tossed violently to one side. He caught Murphy off his balance. Wrestling, wrenching every fibre for supremacy, the two, still locked in each other's arms, staggered to their feet.

Arthur felt Murphy's wrists tighten, and a trigger-finger move. A stinging pain shot through the fleshy part of his hand as the hammer fell upon it. The satchel rose and fell with maddening effect. Soon, Arthur knew, he must give up the unequal conflict unless help came. He strained every muscle to hold still tighter to his opponent. To be free meant a bullet through his side.

Murphy, bulldog-like, shook and tossed his captor. He glanced over Arthur's shoulder, unseeing at first, and then with startled recognition of what he saw.

Across the pond, where Arthur had first spied the park policeman, Murphy glimpsed the flash of brass button as the officer, tardily aroused from his slumber, lumberingly ran toward the vicinity of the shots he had heard.

The spectacle roused Murphy to a crucial effort. He raised the heavy satchel again above his head, and brought it down with crushing force. Arthur glanced upward just in time. He dodged his head to one side. The downward sweep of the satchel glanced from the side of his head and struck his

shoulder. The force of the blow was more than the handle-stitching could support. There was a noise of tearing leather, and the satchel flew from Murphy's grasp, leaving only the handle in his fingers.

This was a reverse of fortune too strong even for Murphy's presence of mind. He jumped for the satchel as it flew into the shadows. His motion as he tried to free himself from Arthur's clutch released his tension upon the revolver butt, and the weapon came loose in Arthur's fingers. Murphy glanced, in a transport of agitation, for the lost satchel, and failed to see it lying behind the bench. His gaze at the same time rested momentarily upon the policeman, now running nearer along the path. Here was more than a Waterloo; it was a rout. Lost were loot, moll, revenge, everything except freedom and life itself. He turned precipitately, and fled.

Arthur, pulling himself together from the ordeal of the beating he had received, suddenly became acutely aware that his prisoner was gone. He stared, bewildered, at the weapon in his hand. Why had he not had sense enough to halt the fugitive? he wondered. He recalled the satchel, and the other's frantic and interrupted search for it.

He looked superficially around. It was not to be seen in the circle of light. He stepped experimentally toward the bushes, then turned back. No use hunting for it in the dark.

His foot struck an object lying near the bench. The thing gave way to the pressure. He looked downward. There, with the rents showing where the handle had been wrenched away, was the satchel.

He stooped, Murphy's revolver still dangling in his grasp, and picked it up, gazing curiously at the unopened bag.

A burly hand clutched at his collar. A paralyzing blow from a night-stick knocked the revolver from his grasp. He whirled, tugging against the fist at his collar, and sought the source of the fresh onslaught. With club upraised, ready to strike at the first sign of resistance, the park policeman glared into Arthur's face.

"Not a move, now," the officer warned, "or I'll brain ye within an inch of yer life!"

Arthur stammered expostulations to his captor.

"But wait!" he argued. "The man you want is gone."

"Yes, an' he'll never be back upon this earth, from the looks of this," the officer replied, motioning toward Murphy's revolver upon the pavement.

"But I tell you he went running in that direction!" Arthur tried to motion toward the angle of Murphy's departure. He received a numbing blow from the night-stick, and subsided.

"Never mind that!" the policeman cautioned. "It's you we're talkin' about, the now. What've you got here?"

Arthur yielded the satchel. The policeman grasped it with his free hand, then, cautious, returned it.

"Open it yerself," he ordered. "And remimber, I've got you covered."

With fumbling fingers, Arthur pried at the clasps. One was wedged tightly, and he broke a finger-nail

in pulling it from its socket. Then the latch clicked, and the bag spread apart.

Their heads drew together as they gazed at the contents of the satchel. The policeman gasped in astonishment. He lowered his night-stick in his awe at what he saw. Then he looked up at Arthur almost in admiration.

"Saints above us!" he exclaimed. "It's a king's ransom! Ye're no pintling of a thief, at that!"

Arthur glanced again into the bag. Crammed into the receptacle, glinting, coruscating, throwing off icicles of fire as they reflected the light overhead, he saw diamonds, pearls, sapphires, emeralds—an Aladdin's wealth of precious gems transmigrated by the touch of a modern genie. Matched strands of priceless pearls were tangled and jumbled with barpins, heavy with platinum, studded with flawless blue-white diamonds worth fortunes in themselves. A coronet in delicate lacery, encrusted with square-cut stones and flashing brilliants, reposed in a corner of the bag. Dinner-rings, pear-shaped pendants, solitaires burning with frigid glow, platinum and diamond-mounted fancies of the lapidary, were mixed in confusion, where they had been tossed by the ravishers of the Sloane estate.

"It's a shame to give it up, an' I'm sorry for ye," murmured the policeman, spellbound at the sight.

The implication stirred Arthur from his rapt admiration of the jewels.

"You—you don't think I *stole* them?" he protested.

The policeman laughed.

"Sure not," he replied. "Yer fairy godmother gave them to ye fer bein' a good boy." He remembered the sound of firing that had brought him there, and added: "And as a reward, as like as not, fer shootin' up yer pal."

"Shooting? I?" Arthur struggled to express how absurd the idea seemed. "Why, I've been here all the time."

"Well, we'll just take a little walk and see what we can find."

The policeman shoved Arthur ahead, in accordance with his words. They traced the way along which Arthur had seen Soapy go, and Murphy come. Their progress was slow. With each step the policeman flashed the rays of his pocket searchlight upon the pavement.

They reached the bridle path, and the officer hesitated, then turned haphazard to the right. They approached the rhododendrons, were about to pass. The cone of light playing from the policeman's hand flickered over a little rivulet creeping upon the pavement.

The light shifted and followed the tiny dark-colored stream to its source. In the electric beam the strangely distorted outlines of Soapy leaped into vision.

"I thought as much," the officer said grimly. He turned to Arthur and snapped handcuffs upon his prisoner's wrists. The precaution was a needless one. A chilling premonition of his predicament robbed Arthur of volition.

The policeman knelt beside what was left of

Soapy and listened. He shook his head, then rose again.

"Ye'll go to the chair fer this," he prophesied.

Arthur was aghast at the construction.

"You don't mean—that—that *I* had anything to do with this?"

"What else?"

"But I was back where you found me—he held me up." In fragments, incoherently, Arthur tried to relate what, so far as he knew, had happened. The policeman cut him short.

"That's a likely story, and you standin' there with a gat in yer hand, still warm!"

"I tell you it's true! He's wearing my clothes now! See!" Arthur started to kneel, to reveal the name-cards in the pocket of his dinner coat. He was roughly, violently jerked back to his feet. The policeman glanced contemptuously at Arthur's shabby attire.

"You! Ye don't know what a decent suit of clothes is like! Be quiet, now! What ye say will be used against ye!"

Arthur tried once more to unravel this tangle of disastrous incident.

"Won't you listen? Won't you let me explain?"

"Aw, tell it to th' judge!"

Arthur fell silent. He was crushed by realization of the futility of using words to lift the burden of circumstantial evidence against him. He felt weak, gone, as if the inside of him were an aching emptiness.

The shrill notes of the policeman's whistle summoning assistance echoed through the park.



AFTER THE BALL

A RENCO PRODUCTION

"Ye'll go to the chair fer this," the policeman prophesied.



## CHAPTER X

“**A**RE you *sure* there’s been no word from—  
from my husband?” The day clerk at the desk in the hotel lobby turned at Gilda’s anxious inquiry. There was a catch in her voice that moved him to sympathy despite his familiarity with the question so often asked him by wives worrying over errant husbands.

It was early morning. The hard, practical light of a workaday world set in bold relief the pre-occupied, intense features of the stream of passers-by on the sidewalk beyond, hurrying about their business. It etched harshly the fine lines of distress that had gathered on Gilda’s face during her all-night vigil.

For all during the night she had lain awake, waiting to hear the elevator door outside her room open to Arthur’s approach; to hear his footsteps outside her door; to listen fearfully, expectantly, for the telephone’s startling summons, with its dread news of overwhelming catastrophe overtaking her husband; for something, *anything* rather than the futile necessity of remaining inactive.

The clerk shook his head gently.

“Not yet, Mrs. Trevelyan,” he replied. He tried to speak with cheer in his tones, but his professional optimism failed to lift her spirits.

She resumed her seat in a large leather chair against a pillar, where she might command a view both of the hotel entrance and the desk. She glanced

again at her wrist-watch, whose hands were dragging with leaden weights. Never before had Arthur been away from her all night. Surely something terrible had happened.

Out of the corner of her eye she observed the day clerk and hotel manager glancing at her covertly. She was sure that they were discussing her. The thought added to her disquietude.

A bell-boy, sent to her by the manager, approached. She was roused with a start from the abstraction of her fears as she heard him say:

"The manager would like to see you in the private office."

She crossed the floor with increasing apprehension, and had to whip herself to a semblance of composure as the boy motioned her into the office.

The manager bowed at her entrance. She was too ill at ease to take the chair he offered. There was an awkward pause.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Trevelyan," he began. "There's a matter—I want to speak to you—"

"Is—is it the bill?" she quavered.

The manager shook his head. He was finding it hard to carry out his purpose. He lifted the morning paper from the litter on the desk-top.

"Don't worry about the bill," he told her. "I'm afraid I have some other matters more serious than that."

Then it *was* concerning Arthur. She flashed hot and cold.

"Mr. Trevelyan?" She half-whispered the question.

For answer he held the paper toward her, folded so that the upper right-hand half of the front page met her eye.

At first she saw only a field of type, a sea of headlines that meant nothing. Then, as if inscribed in characters of frozen fire, the letters screamed at her:

# MILLIONAIRE'S SON SLAIN IN \$150,000 THEFT

---

Arthur Trevelyan, disinherited scion of oil magnate, shot to death by robber "pals"

---

## RICH GEM LOOT REGAINED

---

Murder suspect, nabbed while escaping from park duel, yields Sloane jewelry haul

---

Climaxing a daring raid upon the priceless collection of jewelry owned by Mrs. J. Fassett Sloane, of Mossmere, Long Island, the body of Arthur Trevelyan, son of Mark Trevelyan, California oil millionaire, was found murdered last night in Central Park.

A few feet from the place where the slaying was discovered, an uniden-

tified man who, the police declare, is proved to have been involved in the robbery of the Sloane mansion, was arrested while fleeing from the scene, with the jewelry, hastily thrown into a satchel, still in his possession. The presence of burglars' tools, concealed in the rough coat he was wearing, convince the police that the prisoner was one of the accomplished band of housebreakers responsible for the huge theft.

Young Trevelyan's identity was established, according to the police, by means of the name-labels in the dinner-clothes in which he was attired. In view of his recent alleged disinheritance by his father, following a sensational elopement and marriage to Gilda Gay, Los Angeles screen beauty, police attach significance to the fact that only a small sum was found on his body.

It is the police theory that Trevelyan, reduced to desperate methods by loss of parental income, became involved with a band of internationally-known jewel bandits, and through his social connection, paved the way for the robbery. A dispute over division of the swag is believed to have followed, causing the gun-battle that led to disclosure of the dual crime.

Gilda could read no further. The police conjectures were too horrible to be weighed in detail. She was stunned, struck immobile by the paralyzing blow of type.

She groped desperately for a coherent thought. She smiled—a mirthless reflex that twitched her lips—in an effort to grasp at the absurdity of the notion that Arthur—*her* Arthur—could be concerned in such a hideous blunder of police officiousness.

Surely, she tried to reason, it was all some ghastly error . . .

But suppose it *were* true—all true that Arthur had been involved with the thieves; suppose it *were* true that he had been found slain—*lifeless*—even as the euphemistic reporter had written; suppose—*suppose* . . .

A paroxysm of grief overcame her; dry grief that tightened her eyes and prohibited tears. She was conscious of a flushed face, of pounding temples. A vertiginous blackness came before her. She swayed, and was about to fall.

The manager's hasty grasp of her arm restored her to full consciousness, and a thundering message echoed into her mind to the exclusion of all other thought. She must reach him, she told herself; somehow meet Arthur face to face and reassure herself that it was all a grisly mistake on the paper's part.

"I—I'll see about this," she muttered thickly. She turned from the manager and stumbled from the room.

Blindly, hurriedly, with gathering momentum as her feet responded automatically to the impulse of her desire, she passed from the private office. The manager's restraining hand failed to halt her. Like a somnambulist with a fixed goal that admits of no delay, she moved across the lobby, gathering speed as she went, and at the entrance broke into a running pace that carried her through the sidewalk throngs, oblivious to jostling shoulders and curious glances following her.

Her face was distorted with an ecstasy of anguish as she moved. Her hands twisted and tugged at the gloves she was holding. Her eyes were set upon a distant vision—a scene that shut out the crowd and the streets, and showed instead a body lying in a shadowed glen . . .

She stepped from the curb into the street. Her flying feet bore her amid the crowded flow of traffic. There was a shout of warning which she failed to hear. The driver of a limousine, almost upon her, cursed with alarm as he jammed on his brakes and discovered to his horror that he could not check the speed of his car in time.

An out-jutting fender of the heavy machine struck her as she ran. She became aware vaguely of a sharp twinge as the metal bruised her side. She seemed to be lifted and tossed about by contending cyclones.

Her head struck the paving with stunning force. A dazzling flood of vari-colored lights broke over her and ebbing suddenly, was followed by an increasing blackness through which the figure of Arthur beckoned vaguely . . .

The traffic policeman, brushing his way through the ring that had gathered instantaneously around the fallen figure, lifted her head in his lap. Beside him appeared the driver of the car, his features awry with grief.

"I couldn't help it," he exclaimed. "She ran right in front of me. God! I'd a-given anythin' not to a hit her!"

"That's right," volunteered one of the throng. "I

saw the whole thing. She was runnin' like she was in a dream, or something."

The policeman bent studiously over Gilda's face, paler now than the hair that framed it in dishevelled aureole. There was a slight movement of her lips. Her eyelids flickered for a moment and then were still.

"Quick, somebody! Take her for a minute!" the policeman instructed. "I'll call the ambulance."

He pillow'd Gilda's head in a bystander's arms. His shrill whistle halted the traffic while she was carried to the sidewalk. Soon the clamorous gong of the ambulance announced its arrival on its friendly errand.

## CHAPTER XI

LORRAINE Trevelyan halted her father in their stroll. Before them, but far below, the Bay of Monaco lay like a sapphire, set in the white gold of the surf line that fringed it in the distance. Almost so near, it seemed, that they could have tossed a pebble on its decks, the toylike yacht of the Prince of Monaco rode at anchor behind the sheltering breakwaters that stretched their wings from near and farther shores. To the right of the tiny ship was the lighthouse, its prisms windows sparkling in the sun and reflected in the copper-sulphate blue of the Mediterranean.

The two stepped to the stone balustrade of the terraced height which they had reached in their long walk, and abandoned themselves to the beauties of the vista before them. In the weeks that had followed Arthur's departure, with his bride, from the Trevelyan home, Mark Trevelyan had traveled with nervous restlessness anywhere in Europe that might offer oblivion from the remorseful consciousness that he had been too hasty in expelling his son and Gilda. With him he had taken Lorraine to bring surcease from the unspoken reproaches which he felt endured so long as he remained at home; and with him, too, had come the haunting memory of Arthur's stricken face as he paused in the dining-room doorway for the farewell that he had denied his son.

Now, as he had done so unsuccessfully before, he tried to throw off the weight of realities by diverting himself with externals. He motioned sweepingly toward the horizon.

"Seems more beautiful each time we're here, eh?" he asked Lorraine.

The daughter soberly drank in the splendor of the scene. Her eyes quickened in response to the glow with which she gazed at the picturesque hues of the city of Monte Carlo, that rose sheer from the sea to the crags of the mountains in the distance. Still farther to the left of the city proper, the white walls of the Casino, and the broad stretch of the promenade, shone freshly in the sun. Nearer them, clinging precariously to the precipitous cliffs, were the villas of the luxury-loving wealthy ones from all the world who maintained their retreats along the Cote d'Azure.

Lorraine smiled at her father in transient happiness. Then a shadow darkened her eyes and she replied:

"It's *too* beautiful—how Arthur would have loved to see it again!"

Mark Trevelyan grimaced sourly. There it was again, he complained, inwardly—never could he escape being reminded of Arthur.

"Huh!" he snorted. "All that boy loves is to see Broadway at four in the morning."

Lorraine shook her head.

"Forgive me, Dad—but you were too harsh with him. Arthur had a fineness much beyond anything on Broadway."

It was curious that both his father and sister lately were in the habit of speaking of Arthur as in the past.

"I know it," Trevelyan responded irascibly, as the goad penetrated. "I admit that I lost my temper. But by Heaven! his nonsense drove me beyond myself."

Trevelyan's unhappiness as he spoke turned Lorraine from criticism to compassion. Her father's lot, too, she realized, had not been a happy one for long-linked years.

"Poor Dad!" she offered. "Don't worry—he'll be back with us."

Then the clatter of hoofs along the flinty drive brought them back from that night in Southern California. Two barouches swung around the bend and stopped at the edge of the piazza. From them descended a gaily-chattering group.

Leading the little throng of young people who approached the Trevelyans was an American of twenty-eight or thirty, whose unstudied attire was in contrast with the conspicuous uniforms of a French officer from Algiers and an Italian aviator, and whose fairly handsome, likeable face beamed with glad relief at finding Lorraine here.

She held out a hand in welcome as he came nearer, and there was a suggestion of a corresponding warmth of pressure as she returned his clasp.

"You didn't wait for us," he reproached her, "so we decided to overtake you."

"Blame it, like a gambler does his losses, on Monte Carlo's lure," she replied. "Dad and I couldn't resist the temptation—and here we are."

Then she remembered, and turned to Trevelyan.

"This is Tom Stevens," she informed her father. "Surely you remember him? His father bought the quarter-acre next to ours."

"Of course," Trevelyan answered, and he grasped the young American's hand in recognition. "You're to be our new neighbor, aren't you? But what are you doing here? I understood, as soon as your family had moved from the east, that you were to begin practicing law."

"I was—that is, I'm going to," Stevens replied, in eagerness to gain Trevelyan's approval. "You see, mother is wintering in Palm Beach, and the pater is cleaning up his affairs in New York to be ready to go west in the spring. That left only Europe for me, and now—" his eyes met with Lorraine's—"I'm realizing what a fortunate chance it was."

As if by common wish, Lorraine and Stevens drifted apart from the group. Adroitly he maneuvered her so that his bulk discreetly thwarted any attempts of the other young men to interrupt the brief tete-a-tete, and then began to tell her how lucky he felt himself at having found her.

"Just think! After weeks of aimless wandering, to meet you—" he was saying, and then his glance fell upon a man who had lingered apart from the rest.

Stevens' enthusiasm dropped from his face in dismayed realization that temporarily, at least, he must forego his talk with Lorraine.

"Excuse me just a moment," he pleaded, "and then let me come back to you. This chap here has been

asking for Mr. Trevelyan, and I offered to find your father for him."

Tom moved away, with an unhappy glance backward at the Italian aviator who had usurped him beside Lorraine, and led the man of whom he spoke to Trevelyan's side.

"Roulette?" Trevelyan was saying, in response to the question of a dowager who had annexed him, "there isn't enough action to it for me. Give me a good stiff game of stud poker, with table stakes. There's excitement for you! What's that?"

Tom Stevens had touched his arm.

"From the American consul," Tom explained, and introduced his companion.

"Mr. Trevelyan? I'm sorry to interrupt, but it's important. May I have a word with you?"

Apologizing, Mark Trevelyan allowed himself to be drawn away. The dowager watched after him with an affectation of amused tolerance.

"Those American business men!" she exclaimed. "How their affairs follow them!"

When the young man from the consul's office had led Trevelyan to a detached part of the piazza, he began to prepare the way for his mission with:

"I've an urgent message, Mr. Trevelyan. For weeks we've been trying to find you, sir, all over Europe. It's—"

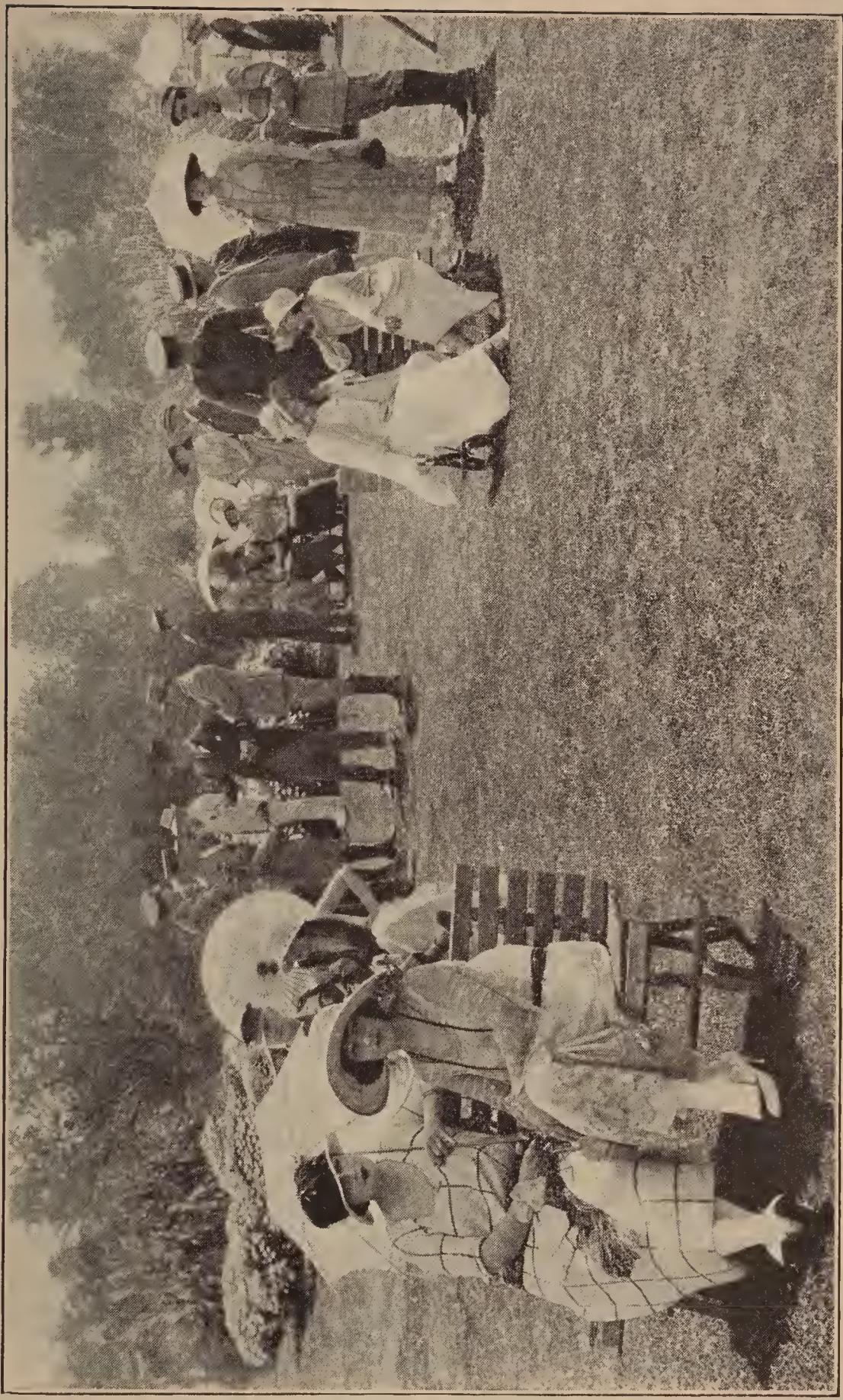
"I left strict instructions," Trevelyan interrupted, "that I wasn't to be annoyed with business matters—"

"It isn't business, sir, or I shouldn't have intruded now. Here!"

AFTER THE BALL

A RENCO PRODUCTION

Tom moved away, with an unhappy glance backward at the Italian aviator who had usurped him beside Lorraine.





The young man from the consul's office, finding futility in words, had drawn from his pocket the familiar oblong sheet of a cablegram. Frowningly Trevelyan adjusted his glasses and received the message thrust awkwardly at him. Below the cabalistic lettering which headed the missive he read:

ADVISE MARK TREVELYAN DEATH OF  
SON ARTHUR IN NEW YORK DETAILS  
FOLLOWING VIA MAIL CABLE  
INSTRUCTIONS BURIAL BODY

Trevelyan stiffened against the blow. His lips, under the white mustache, compressed and trembled a little. So quickly, he thought parenthetically, the problems solve themselves apart from efforts of little men.

"If there is anything we can do, sir," volunteered the young man from the consul's office. Trevelyan nodded in abstraction. So simply, Trevelyan mused, had been removed in Arthur's death necessity for doubts about his future. There remained only the ineffable wound of a remorseful memory.

He asked eagerly for details. The consular attache shook his head.

"We have had no other information," he replied. Then Trevelyan remembered Gilda.

"There has been no word of his wife, sir," he was told.

Probably, Trevelyan thought, she had played a principal part in the causes leading to Arthur's death, and had then decamped.

"I—I'll give you instructions later," Trevelyan

said. The young man left. With his departure came surging back the torrent of mental pictures that had remained, like Dead Sea fruit, ever since Arthur's departure from his home. Even so little while ago, Trevelyan recalled, he had talked with Lorraine about the boy. He remembered the ambitions he had had to see his son at the head of the vast machinery he had built out of the oil industry. No need now, he told himself, to create a trusteeship to safeguard his fortune for his son. . . . There was to *be* no son to carry on his name . . . . No virile manhood to continue where he had stopped . . . Only himself, with his work done —and Lorraine. And she would marry, and there would be children of another name, and he could only devise his estate to her.

He glanced upward. In the near distance he saw his daughter chattering vivaciously with the young Italian aviator, while that man from New York who was moving to Los Angeles, Tom Stevens, was trying to get a word in edgeways. Too bad, he pondered, that he must blight her new-found gaiety with his news. But the necessity was not to be denied.

Lorraine responded happily to his call and started toward him. Left to themselves, the Italian and Stevens exchanged cigarettes in an obvious effort, which each recognized in the other, to disregard the potential rivalry between them.

Silently Trevelyan placed his arm around his daughter's shoulders. The old man was summoning back to his assistance all the dogged resiliency which

had made his place for him. If he could place the heaviest part of the burden on her shoulders at once and help her to bear it standing, he reasoned, the aftermath of the shock would be easier for her to bear.

Still without speaking, he showed her the cablegram. Her father's attitude already had forewarned her, but not of the simple completeness of the blow. She felt a desire to shout, to scream, anything to relieve the constriction in her throat, but no sound came.

Then she saw mistily the figures of Stevens and the aviator. They were warnings that here, among these interlopers to her woe, she must not yield to her emotions. She ordered her jumping nerves to obedience, and succeeded in a steel-like poise. Like her father, she sought refuge in details.

And again it developed that the baldness of the cablegram was their only source of knowledge. She tried to reason, to check her sense of motion, as if the world were dropping from under her, by reversion to logic. She, too, thought of Gilda, but with more charitable heart.

But since the cable failed to mention her, it followed that Gilda was an unknown quantity to the personages who had sent the message. Therefore, she thought, no one who knew Arthur personally could have officiated in the mortuary details after his death. And with this the sinking sensation returned.

"It hurts," she said, managing to keep from her face any sign of grief that others might see, "to think

that there is no one with him now—not even his wife—to take care of him.”

Trevelyan, with a tenderness that he had not felt since Lorraine was in pigtails, tried to soften the sting of her thoughts. Softly, in an undertone, in order that the outsiders might not hear, his words of comfort came haltingly. Lorraine rallied. She nodded bravely, and a few tears came. She tossed her head to free them from her face, and smiled tremulously at him.

“Just we two left, Dad,” she responded.

“Just we two,” replied Trevelyan. He turned her gently toward the waiting carriage, and the motion brought her head against his shoulder. There she pillowed it, as he half-led, half-carried her, toward the barouche.

“How odd!” commented the dowager as she watched the father and daughter leave. “Those impulsive Americans!”

But Stevens, whose eyes had never left Lorraine, sensed that he had brought bad news, and uncomprehending, was stirred with sympathy.

## CHAPTER XII

IT IS easier, though far less assuring, to remember than it is to see ahead. The trite truthfulness of this recurred with overwhelming force to Arthur Trevelyan as he raised his head from his hands, and, seated upon the rough blanket of his cot, stared unseeingly at the narrow confines of his prison cell.

If only some clairvoyance, he wished for the thousandth time, had been given him by which he might have seen, and thereby have avoided, the consequences of his folly! Better yet, if only he could have avoided folly itself! If he had listened to advice! If he had yielded to the pleas of his father—his sister—his wife! If, even, he only knew what had become of his wife—if he had even heard from her once since his arrest and imprisonment!

If! If! If!—the shadows thrown across the cell floor by the barred gratings of the door, illuminated by the dim night-light in the corridor beyond, formed the word fantastically in the crisscross pattern. The design mocked at him. So much of his life had been predicated upon the monosyllable.

If only the interminable years which had passed, years that seemed so much longer than they were in reality, had brought him one word from his family that offered hope of another chance when he had served his term! How eagerly this time he would profit by the opportunity!

And then he almost relaxed into a smile at his silly disregard of fact. How could his family, he remembered, have any idea that he—a convict with only a prison number to call his own—was alive, when he had permitted his identity to be merged with that of the nameless one he had seen lying lifeless in the Park? His question, he saw, admitted of but one answer.

A familiar sound echoing from the corridor broke insinuatingly into Arthur's reverie. He moved quietly to the door, and pressing his face against the bars, spied obliquely down the avenue of grated cubicles.

At the far end of the corridor, moving slowly over his broom and dust-pan with the deliberation of one who knows that a task ended means merely another to commence, was approaching one Smooth Sullivan—quondam confidence man by occupation, more recently a convict, “*trusty*” by virtue of his approaching discharge with good-conduct allowance, and at present, through prison propinquity, the one friend in all of Arthur Trevelyan’s years whose friendliness was not due partly to Mark Trevelyan’s money.

Arthur loitered at the cell door, in expectation of a muttered word or two in continuation of the historic narrative which he had been giving Smooth in nightly fragments. Smooth reached the door, stooped for an imaginary straw, stole a backward glance to make sure no guard was in sight, and then rested his weight, casually alert, against the door with a whispered greeting to Arthur.

In the close-clipped, sketchy, stenographic dialect he had acquired in his five years of incarceration, Arthur resumed his narration of events at the point where his last installment of the serial had ended.

"They had it on me," he continued. "Soon as cop whistled for wagon I tumbled to fact I hadn't chance in the world. I was caught with goods—yeggman outfit, gun still smelling fresh of powder, bagful of jewelry—everything against me."

Smooth nodded in sympathy.

"Sure," he agreed. "Many a lad's gone to chair for less'n that. But why didn't your mouthpiece tell 'em who you were?"

"My lawyer?" Arthur asked. "I didn't dare. Just the point. Knew I was up against it. Better let family think me dead than disgrace 'em again. Let 'em all believe me just ordinary second-story man, give me my jolt of ten years, maybe, an' then—"

"S-s-s-t!" Smooth hissed the warning. Arthur dodged back into the obscurity of his cell and Smooth stole a hurried glimpse toward the corridor entrance. He waited, tense, for a moment. Then he relaxed again.

"Thought I heard night guard," he explained. "Go on—gimme the dope."

"Not much more. Smart cops fastened burglary record on me, an' I let 'em. Knew they couldn't pin murder charge on me if my lawyer argued self-defense. Pleaded guilty. Ten years."

Again Smooth nodded in acquiescence.

"You got a sharp head, kid," he observed. "When you get out we'll form a mob and clean up."

"No, Smooth." Arthur tried to make his refusal inoffensive. "I've got other things to do. Listen!"

Smooth moved closer in expectation of a more enticing and lucrative form of piracy than he had known. But Arthur's next words disillusioned him.

"You're going 'outside' soon. Long time has passed, but possibly you can find my wife. Help her. I'll make it up, somehow."

Smooth brushed aside the suggestion of repayment for any future effort.

"Forget dough, kid. I got plenty cached away. How'll I help?"

Eagerly Arthur told him his scant store of information of Gilda's former haunts.

"Maybe she's gone back with her crowd. I tried to get word to her during my trial, but my lawyer could find no trace of her. Hunt for her, anyway—"

"And if I don't find her, what then?"

"I know it's a slim chance," Arthur replied despondently. "Now I have only my sister, in Los Angeles. Go to her—"

Smooth gripped Arthur's hand as a second warning. From the lower tier sounded the scuffle of the approaching night patrol.

"Quick!" interrupted Smooth. "Here comes the flatty."

"Tell her that I'm alive, and here," Arthur instructed, "even though she must not visit me. Let her know I'll reach her sometime, when I can start over again clean. Tell her—"

Catlike, Smooth's figure moved from the door. As

quickly and silently, Arthur threw himself upon his cot and pretended pre-occupation in his thoughts. The night guard peered casually through the iron lattice of the cell. Smooth was half-way down the passageway.

The next day, through the “underground” that is the despair of prison wardens to obliterate, Arthur learned that Smooth had received his discharge, the state’s largesse of a five-dollar note and a suit of black, and had passed through the Big Gate to freedom.

Trevelyan glanced quizzically over his glasses at Lorraine as she moved about the living-room. There was an air of poised expectancy in her motions, a suggestion that she was endeavoring to dissemble an impatience with dragging moments by her attention to trifles. She was pottering aimlessly with unnecessary changes in the position of objects; moving them from their places only to put them back again. This was a new phase of her in Trevelyan’s ken. Hitherto she had been marked always by an efficient economy of movement.

The years which had passed had enriched Lorraine not only with a greater wealth of beauty, but with an unassertive charm borne of the ever-present sense of tragedy in Arthur’s supposed death. Behind the lambent softness in her eyes there was a trace of sorrow—the hint of an unshed tear mingling with a smile—a combination irresistible to the suitors who had come, and gone their way baffled.

"Lorraine is *such* a sweet girl," was the current comment. "But she will never marry. There's something about her that holds her back."

Something of all this must have passed through Trevelyan's mind as he watched his daughter and noted with what unusual care she had dressed for the evening. He puzzled over her, and then decided to approach his questioning by indirection.

"How's the law business progressing?" he asked.

"Law business?" she repeated. She placed a sheet of music carefully on the piano and fingered at the keys. "You mean Tom Stevens?"

"That's the one. How is he doing with his practice?"

"Why—splendidly, I understand. What made you think of him?"

"Nothing in particular." Trevelyan puffed voluminously at his cigar.

Lorraine smiled.

"How complimented Tom would be to know that 'nothing in particular' reminds you of him!"

Trevelyan choked on the fumes of the tobacco. It was not like Lorraine, he thought, to indulge in repartee with a sting to it. He was too skilled in observation to fail to note that her interest in the piano was not entirely genuine.

"Seen him recently?"

"Who, Tom? Yes—a little." Increased preoccupation with the keyboard.

"You've known him quite a while—three, four years?"

"Five, Dad."

"Five years! What's he waiting for?"

"Waiting for what, dear? I don't understand."

"To ask you to marry him, of course! What's the matter with him?"

Lorraine swung herself around on the piano bench, ran, and deposited herself abruptly in her father's lap, with disastrous consequences to Trevelyan's dignity.

"Dad! You dear old goose! Of course he hasn't asked me! Why, we're just good friends! He's—he's—besides, he's too busy with building up his practice and getting a reputation."

"Not too busy to see you every chance he gets. I'll wager he's the only one of the bunch who hasn't! Isn't that so?"

Lorraine inspected her finger-tips.

"Well, there have been a few—but I couldn't like them that way—tell me, Dad, what's turning over in your mind?"

She grasped his chin and turned his face toward hers. Trevelyan tried to dissimulate, and then capitulated beneath her steady glance.

"It's this, baby girl—your father's getting older, and sometimes he thinks you're lonely, spending your time with him. He's seen these young men come, and devote themselves to you—and then go away. Tell Daddy why."

The question was too hard for answer. How could she tell him that she had resolutely shut the doors of her heart against romance since the day when the two of them, with their arms around each other, had made of the phrase: "Just we two—to-

gether," a pledge of unity? How let him know that her loyalty to him was costing her the denial of the one love that had come into her life?

Into her embrace, as she threw her arms around his shoulders and hugged him closely to her, she put all the fervor and warmth of her starved affections. But she said, lightly:

"How could I *possibly* think of anyone else when I have you as an incomparable example? So long as you want me with you, I'm satisfied to remain an old maid."

"Old maid! Bosh! You're just an infant."

They laughed at the quaint concept of Lorraine as an elderly spinster, and their eyes twinkled. But Lorraine was afraid lest her own eyes reveal her suffering, and she directed them downward. In doing so her glance took in the calendar on the desk before them. The figures of the day, and the name of the month assumed an acute significance. Her thoughts suddenly became far away.

Trevelyan followed her eyes and observed the detachment of her thought. The date to him also brought a meaning other than a chronological one, and he looked upward at Lorraine. As he did so she became aware that he had penetrated her thoughts, and their glances met.

"You know?" she asked, in a still, hushed voice.

Trevelyan nodded. It was as if a sudden eclipse had dimmed their world.

"Just five years," she murmured, "yet it seems only yesterday since Arthur was here."

"It has been a long yesterday," he replied. He sank into a melancholy reverie, and for once Lorraine did not try to bring cheer to his mood.

"Always," he continued, "I've had him with me. Regardless of what is happening, his memory is always here."

He tapped his glasses meditatively on the table, and continued:

"I'm sorry I was always so strict with him. Maybe—if I had not tried to hold so tight a rein, he wouldn't have been so headstrong—wouldn't have been mixed with that burglary—"

"Dad Trevelyan!"

Lorraine leaped to her feet, instantly dynamic, and swirled to face her father.

"He wasn't—he wasn't. I'll never believe he was guilty of that! Headstrong, yes, and foolish, too! But lovable, honestly so! Never a criminal! There was some mystery about the whole thing—something still to be explained—Oh! If only we had been nearer to have taken care of things—"

The entrance of a maid checked her in her vehement defence. Hastily Trevelyan brushed the ashes from his coat and resumed his reading. Lorraine glanced inquiringly at the servant.

"It's Mr. Stevens," stated the maid.

"Oh!"

Trevelyan noticed that Lorraine positively fluttered as she adjusted a shoulder-strap of her evening frock, touched her hair before a mirror and passed into the foyer to receive Tom Stevens. Not such a bad sign, Trevelyan mused; but an infrequent one,

and something which made him entertain various conjectures, none of which was correct.

“Tom Stevens, Father!” Lorraine announced in the doorway. The two made a pretty picture, the old man thought, as he glimpsed at Tom’s stalwart build, offset by Lorraine’s lithe daintiness.

“How is young Blackstone working?” Trevelyan asked.

“With jurisprudence, sir,” Stevens replied.

“Tom! What an atrocious pun!” Lorraine chided. The two crossed the room and were at Trevelyan’s side.

“I’m glad you dropped in, Tom,” Trevelyan said, in welcome. He affected not to be aware that Tom’s visit was not entirely impromptu, and continued:

“Just in time for a little three-handed mah-jongg.”

“Fine! That is, if—” Tom hesitated and his eyes signaled to Lorraine an appeal for rescue.

“We mustn’t stay, Dad,” she responded. “There’s a committee that is meeting to arrange the Charity Ball details, and I’m dragging Tom along. I simply can’t do without him.”

“Very well—leave me to my lonely old age!” Trevelyan pretended resignation tinged with utter despair.

“Father! We won’t go.” Lorraine curled up in his lap again and turned to Tom.

“Tom, get the mah-jongg tiles. We’ll stay here this evening.”

“Nonsense,” exclaimed Trevelyan. “You’ll do nothing of the kind. Go ahead and enjoy yourselves. I’m quite all right.”

"Are you sure?"

"Certainly. Off with you!"

He thrust Lorraine from his knees and urged her toward Tom Stevens, whose face showed his relief at hope for an evening in which he might have Lorraine more to himself than at a gaming table.

But as they started toward the door Trevelyan called Lorraine back to his side and made her lean near to him while he whispered:

"Sure you two are only good friends?"

For her first time, Lorraine was uncomfortably aware of a suffused glow of embarrassment.

"Maybe—just a little more—" she confided. Then she hurried away lest Trevelyan force further confession from her.

In the foyer Tom Stevens had dismissed the maid and was holding Lorraine's cloak for her. As he started to place it around her shoulders the movement brought his arm in tempting proximity. His hand trembled as he compelled himself to resist the lure to hold her close, close to him, and the tone of his voice was not entirely normal when he asked:

"Did you mean what you said?"

Lorraine detected in the thickness of his words an impending crisis, and was warned by it. What girl would encourage a proposal under such unpropitious circumstances—with a maid in the offing, a father in an adjoining room, and the unromantic background of a foyer hall for stage scenery? Consequently it is not to be wondered at that she replied, evading:

"Mean what, Tom?"

For a barrister who was establishing himself as a skilful propounder of the law and the fact before judges and juries, Tom was singularly bald of phrases. He groped for words, and stammered:

“What you said—about needing me?”

Lorraine hesitated. She was impelled to remove the barriers she had erected, but could not bring herself to the point of yielding then. It was with sprightly indifference, apparently, that she answered, deliberately mistaking his meaning:

“Of course—I’d be bored to death if you weren’t with me at the meeting.”

But if Tom found no encouragement in the vivacity with which she placed her hand on his arm and prompted him to lead her to his waiting car, Old Man Trevelyan, watching the byplay through the archway leading into the living-room, was not deceived. Soon, he knew, he would be more alone than ever.

Just an old man whose work was over, he told himself. Of what use to him were his bonds, and his dividends, and his oil royalties? Maybe, if Arthur had lived . . . .

## CHAPTER XIII

SOMETIMES, in escaping through one mesh in the dragnet of the law, the criminal finds himself caught in another snare. Three-Finger Murphy had always had a hunch that the peculiarities of his right hand would be his undoing. Not long ago he had been so careless as to leave an imprint of his deformed digits on a safe with which he had been toying; and here he was, doing time "up the river" as proof that it never does to neglect the promptings of a hunch.

Arthur Trevelyan, bent over the motor of an automobile in the prison garage, did not look upward as the guard brought Murphy into the shop and assigned the new convict to his job. Arthur had grown accustomed, had become saturated, in fact, with the prison attitude of indifference to the happenings in their walled-in world. A certain number of things were to be done, he knew, in a certain number of days, for a certain number of weeks, and months, and years, before he would be summoned to the warden's office to be discharged.

Not so with the newcomer. Murphy accepted his interment philosophically, and was determined to see all that was to be observed, do everything to be done, and make the most out of anything that offered diversion.

He watched cautiously, furtively, until the guard had gone from the building, in accordance with the

practice of the prison regime that had removed from the inmates the constant oppression of espionage.

When the guard had vanished Murphy turned his scrutiny to Arthur, who was still plodding methodically at the inner intricacies of the motor. Something in his task-mate's features stirred a hint of memory in Murphy's stolid brain. He studied Arthur's face while he made a pretense of polishing down the body of the car. That quality which Murphy described vaguely as "the class" was recognized in Arthur by the criminal's slowly functioning mental cells. The same personality which had made Arthur well-liked in his palmy days still was communicating its impression, even in the prison. Murphy was moved by it, and reacted.

But even more than the spontaneous appreciation on Murphy's part that here was someone to tie up with—someone whose acquaintance somehow might become future capital—was the insistent whispering in Murphy's head that he had met Arthur under an unusual circumstance.

Murphy struggled vainly to pin down the impression, but it was elusive. Arthur, he was sure, never had been mingled with any of his mobs. It was not through some moll that they had conflicted. Then where? How?

On the off-chance that his intuition was correct Murphy put the matter to a test.

"Say, where'd I lamp you before?" he demanded.

For the first time since Murphy had been brought into the garage Arthur glanced directly at the other.

There was nothing in Murphy's face that suggested a previous meeting. Arthur shook his head calmly.

"Never, that I know of," he replied, and resumed his work.

But the brief moment of motion on Arthur's part gave Murphy the strand of thought for which he was groping. Now he placed his vis-a-vis. Step by step, limping, his ideas carried him backward to his flight from Central Park, his loss of the precious bag of jewelry, the last desperate effort during his struggle with the stranger that had torn the bag from his grasp, the contest for the revolver, the body-to-body conflict on the ground, until—

Then the image was fastened in his mind. He recalled vividly, now that the arduous mental effort had won success, the other's face as he had last seen it, illuminated by the park light as its owner lay on his back with himself, his own face in shadow, struggling over him. Talk about hunches! They never threw you down!

Here you go along for years trying to figure the low-down on why some other bimbo butts in and lets hisself get sent up for a job you pulled yourself, and all the time you nurse a yen to flag this stiff and get it outta him straight, see, and then he sticks up like a sore thumb right where you want him.

Wouldn't do, though, to pipe it off to this lad that you were in on the job yourself. Use the old head-piece and don't let him get a tumble to what's your line.

"Listen, brother," began Murphy, on a plane of easy good fellowship. "Whatta yuh in for?"

And Arthur, not dreaming to whom he was relating his history, told him.

"Don't you believe, Lorraine, that Charity begins at home?"

Lorraine and Tom were seated before the fire in the Trevelyan living-room, whither the tea-wagon had just been wheeled. All the previous evening, and during their time together this afternoon, Tom had been trying to guide their conversation into more personal channels than Lorraine had wished, but she had carefully steered their spoken thoughts from the dangerous shoals of what is, after all, the most interesting topic: that of you, and me, and of ourselves. Instead, she had been full of ideas concerning the forthcoming Charity Ball; ideas to which ordinarily Tom would have given enthusiastic attention, had he not been engrossed in the most intriguing idea of all.

"At home? That's an old saying, isn't it? I suppose it's a true one."

"And don't you think," continued Tom, eager to follow up his advantage, "that Charity, like Pity, is akin to Love?"

"Have a cup of tea, Tom."

"But don't you agree with me?"

He tried across the table to take her hand to emphasize his question, but found that she had thrust the cup into it instead. The sudden discovery dis-

turbed his carefully prepared logic and he fumbled at the cup nervously. Lorraine covertly was amused at his discomfiture, and, perhaps in unconscious confirmation of his postulate, took pity on him.

"Do you like lemon?—probably they *are* much alike—or do you prefer sugar?"

"I don't *mean* that lemon and sugar are alike—I mean Pity, and Love."

She revealed the devastating batteries of her violet eyes for a moment, and he found himself unable to combat their barrage. He was in a funk. Rather would he have risked contempt of the most crabbed old judge on the bench than to carry through, but his objective was one which he must win at all costs.

"What a wonderful trial lawyer you must be," she teased. "You state your case so convincingly, I'm sure you would win any jury."

"You're not a jury," he observed darkly. "Lorraine—"

Again he attempted the maneuver of the outstretched hand.

"One of these biscuits? Forgive me—you must try them. The cook is wonderful!"

To the impediment of the teacup and saucer he discovered himself burdened additionally with a plate of biscuit, and both hands occupied. He tried to rid himself of the encumbrances by setting the saucer on his knee, and balanced it there precariously while he gulped down the tea. It was surprisingly and disconcertingly hot, and the tears that came to his eyes were not those of self-pity, though he would

have embraced his torture willingly if he could have known that they inspired real pity in her.

A bite of biscuit was like ambrosial snow to his parched throat, and in the luxury of physical relief from discomfort he abandoned his argument to the court while one after the other, he devoured the biscuits.

Lorraine was not deliberately being the coquette. Indeed, her flirtatious badinage was of a defensive measure. Now that the thunder of the pursuer was close upon her an instinctive panic seized her which would not permit her to listen to the promptings of her heart. Knowing that she must yield, she fought against accepting the inevitable. Thus automatically she aided Tom to defeat her, for her elusiveness fanned his ardor and overcame his scruples at breaking through her reserve.

Tom found himself suddenly clear-headed and purposeful. The biscuits were gone, and out of his way. He wondered why it had not occurred to him before to place the teacup and saucer upon the table. He did so now. There was a jingle of silverware and thin china as he reached across, disregarding the imminent peril to the tea-service, and grasped one of the fluttering hands.

“Wait, Tom! You’re upsetting the creamer!”

Tom dexterously rescued the silver pitcher as it was on the verge of flooding the linen, but he did not release his grasp.

“Lorraine, you *know* I love you—!”

Masterfully now, not to be interrupted though he precipitate an avalanche of creamers and tea-services,

he drew her closer and leaned far over the table. His face showed none of its former humble diffidence. His eyes commanded hers. She was a dryad, and the pounding hoofs of Pan were close upon her.

“Tom—please—the table—Tom—”

Abruptly he freed her hand. He rose and took a quick stride. He shoved the tea-table to one side, and the wagon careened dangerously to the accompaniment of tinkling ware. Then he placed himself upon the arm of her chair. He imprisoned the hands, held her close, leaned over her so that she could not escape him.

“But I *love* you, Lorraine, and I’m not going to let that tea-wagon keep me from telling you so!”

She was very quiet and still in the chair. Violent misgivings attacked him. He was on his knees. Uneloquent, unstudied pleas came from his lips.

“I love you so! I always have! Tell me you forgive me! I want you—could you be my wife? I can’t help all this—the tea-wagon in the road, and all that—”

Still she was quiescent. Of a sudden he was gripped with a great fear. What had he done, he wondered, that had jeopardized his happiness?

“Lorraine —?”

She raised her eyes; but now there was none of the lightnings that had awed him. Only a sublime affection, that spoke to him through the deep-fringed lashes. A heady intoxication came over him. His temples throbbed as he read her answer. A twinkle

lurked (trust the girl to have the saving grace of humor!) and after what seemed eons she replied:

“Oh, Tom, dear! That tea-wagon’s been on wheels all the time!”

When he had held her in his arms long enough to awake to the reality of his happiness, when each had said and done all the immortally tender things and words which only lovers find sacred, when they discovered themselves merely strolling along a rainbow where just before they had been striding across universes, Lorraine remembered.

“You are making me change an idea which has been very firmly fixed in my mind,” she told him.

“Have you just decided that possibly you *can* love me a little?” he asked.

“Foolish one! I’ve always loved you—at least, nearly always. It’s something else.”

He waited, while she paused, for her to continue.

“You never met my brother, did you?” she asked after a brief silence.

“No,” Tom replied, “but I’ve often heard of him. He left just before we came west, I seem to remember. Married, didn’t he?”

“Yes, he married. Then—he died.”

“Dear girl!” He kissed her gently in sympathy.

“His death left Dad with just myself. We said we would be together always. I thought at the time I could help take Arthur’s place with him, but lately I’ve known that I can’t. I wonder if you—”

“Anything in the world you wish! You know you have only to ask.”



AFTER THE BALL

A RENCO PRODUCTION

"Have you just decided that possibly you *can* love me  
a little?" Tom asked.



"Do you really mean that, Tom? Would you do *anything*, just because I asked it?"

"You know I would! Try me, and see."

"This isn't very much—but do you suppose we might have Father with us for a while? I'm sure it would help make him happy again to have a young man near him. Only, today, he had something on his mind—"

And then she realized that she was about to betray to Tom the fact that others beside himself had not been entirely unaware of his love for her, and to hide her confusion she buried her face against the cool stiffness of his collar, and Tom was too busy enjoying the sensation to notice the hiatus in her words.

## CHAPTER XIV

ALL the day, so drearily like every other prison day, Arthur had labored at his task in the garage, taking infinite efforts with minor adjustments which might have been dismissed in an hour. But the narcotic effect of unthinking concentration upon unessentials that made the body an automaton and the mind a blank was his only salvation. Without these things, he thought when he dared risk the dissipation of thinking, he would have raved under a disintegration of nerves.

But he had seen what had happened to others who had broken; had seen them dragged, writhing, kicking, screaming, to unknown horrors; had heard hints of places where unfortunates were kept in "solitary." He could keep from breaking to that extent, he knew. The years that had gone by—the years that were still to be endured—God! Could he stick it out?

Working, desperately intent upon nothing, he had paid scant attention to the grey-garbed figure who was beside him. Since Smooth Sullivan, his only friend in the big prison since his commitment, had been discharged, Arthur had found little of interest in his fellow-inmates. One man was so like another; either a self-illusioned victim of misfortune who had a story of having been convicted for a crime not committed, or a hardened criminal awaiting only

his chance to repeat a trick, the next time sure of escaping the consequences by being a little more clever.

If Arthur, though, was too saturated with the anodyne of habit to find interest in Three-Finger Murphy, Murphy, still keenly alive to his predicament, was very aware of the stroke of fortune that had thrown him with Arthur. In Arthur's narrative of the events that had placed him in prison, Murphy had gleaned a hint here and there that Arthur's connections might prove profitable in some way yet undefined. Here, Murphy reasoned, was at once a chance to lay a foundation for that profit, and at the same time pave the way for the more immediate project he had in mind.

It had taken no little mental effort to reach this conclusion, but with the decision reached, Murphy acted upon it with the direct simplicity which had made him among the foremost of his profession.

His glance of precaution to make sure that no guard was in hearing was one of habit. Then he leaned forward to Arthur and whispered his invitation.

"Getaway? Escape from *here*? No chance!" Arthur replied incredulously.

The opposition stirred Murphy to flights of convincing eloquence. He rehearsed verbally each step in the plan which he had been sketching ever since a deputy sheriff had turned him over to the warden.

As Arthur listened, some long dormant ambition turned over lazily in his brain and stretched itself to wakefulness. His eyes became keen with interest in

Murphy's scheme. Eagerly he questioned, raising surface objections for the satisfaction of having them satisfied by Murphy's answers.

At length Arthur nodded in agreement with Murphy's contention that the proposal was a feasible one. Murphy paused, then put the issue to the test.

"Whadda yuh say?" he demanded.

"I'll do it!" Arthur declared. "Anything rather than this—even if it kills me!"

He felt a glow of relief at having crossed his Rubicon. There was a satisfying knowledge that again he was able to gamble with his fate—to be able to guide a course of his own volition, even if the game were to be of brief duration, with a guard's bullet taking the final trick.

True to his promise, Smooth Sullivan's first activity after having retrieved his emergency bankroll from a safe deposit box and having attired himself in raiment that more gladly expressed his soul, was to gather up the severed threads of Gilda's trail as Arthur had given them.

The glow of virtue which warmed him in consciousness of being a square-shooter and sticking to his word was reflected in the splendor of his apparel. The discreet shepherd's plaid of his suit established a themal treatment which was elaborated in the gray of his suede shoes and the sheerness of his silk shirt, of the same hue; a bit of contrasting color was furnished in the scarlet of his tie, which in turn was modified by the somber sheen of the black pearl that was his only jewelry.

Smooth had spent much time in achieving this effect, but the results, as he felt the stares of passers-by whom he encountered on the shabby city side street, repaid him for his labor.

Smooth, as he strolled leisurely along the sidewalk and picked his way among the groups of juvenile humanity at play, glanced frequently at the numbers over the doors of the houses that stretched, monotonously alike in the brownstone uniformity ahead. He was in a block solid with rooming-houses and boarding-places; places that once had been dignified with private ownership and residence until changing progress had turned them into humbler usage.

He glanced speculatively at one number painted on the fanlight above a forbidding doorway. This was it, he remembered; it was the address given him at the hospital where, he had discovered, Gilda had been taken. He hesitated while he sought to improve the perfection of his appearance by straightening a lapel, then ascended the narrow, footworn "stoop," and pressed the door-bell. A jingle echoed dismally from the cavernous depths of the interior.

His meditation of the luster of his finger-nails was interrupted by the appearance of a gaunt woman, slightly redolent of last night's boiled dinner, who stood in the scant opening between the door and jamb. Against the bottom of the door she held a precautionary foot.

Smooth's suave inquiry failed to remove her attitude of suspicion and guard against a world of

chicanery. Her chill demeanor increased as she surveyed Smooth's attire and resented its shrieking affluence. She shook her head with finality.

"No such person here," she announced, and started to close the door.

But Smooth, with a deftness inherited from the days when he had served an apprenticeship at hoodwinking the gullible by selling de luxe editions, deftly slipped his foot against the bottom of the door, wedging it fast. He smiled ingratiatingly, and asked:

"Do you remember if you ever had a—a guest of that name?"

All her life the woman had rebelled inwardly at being known as a landlady, and had longed to be considered, instead, a hostess. The word "guest," with its glamour of Sunday society columns, did the trick, and she relented slightly.

"She *was* here," the woman began, and then remembering, added tartly, "but she left owin' me \$13.65. I'm holdin' her baggage, what there is of it."

Smooth's expression of sympathy implied a world of appreciation of the tribulations which a hostess for hire must bear, and he reached into his pocket. With a gesture as if apologizing for intruding such a mercenary matter into their amenities, he produced a roll of bills, carelessly allowing the denomination of the uppermost, a \$50 note, to be visible.

"That's a mere trifle," he observed jocularly.

"You'll let me have her belongings—and pay the bill?"

The landlady pondered. Rarely did she ever have an opportunity to recoup on an overdue lodgings account.

"Well, it ain't regular—"

Smooth toyed seductively with the roll.

"But I suppose it's all right." The landlady capitulated, and held out her hand. Smooth shook his head in smiling reproof, and motioned in the general direction of the interior.

"Cash on delivery," he quoted.

The woman bit her lips at the rebuff to her greediness. She turned to go for Gilda's belongings, but before she closed the door, Smooth noticed, she replaced in position the heavy chain which allowed the door to be opened again for only a scant few inches.

When she had departed Smooth hugged his bank-roll close to his belt line and carefully, so that no chance wind might blow it away, peeled off the fifty-dollar bill. He ran through the remaining notes with meticulous care. The roll of such ample proportions, with its appearance of wealth induced by the outside wrapper, now was disclosed as being a sheaf of one-dollar bills; but Smooth long ago had learned the value of a "flash."

He had just counted out the fourteen one-dollar notes when the door reopened and the woman stood with a battered suitcase in one hand. She did not release her grasp on it until Smooth had deposited the bills in her other hand.

"I dunno's I've got the change," she demurred.

"Oh, my dear Madam! Please keep the change, for your trouble!"

Smooth brushed aside such minor matters with an airy wave of his hand. Debonairly he swung toward the pavement, swinging the suitcase, whose lightness revealed the meagerness of its contents, as he walked briskly away. After him watched the landlady. She dubiously inspected each bank-note, almost regretting that they were not silver, that she might test them with her teeth. Dourly she accepted their genuineness, and observed:

"Much good it'll do him—that bunch of old junk!"

Whatever it was, however, which Smooth found in the suitcase, was of sufficient importance to cause him to be the last, that afternoon, to hurry through the gates of the Grand Central Station and board the Twentieth Century just as that Chicago-bound train started to pull out. Smooth had timed his departure to the minute, in the hope that any Central Office detective (and he knew that detectives often, and usually did, manage to spot Sing-Sing graduates) who might have been shadowing him, would have been thrown off by the ruse.

Similarly at Chicago it was by devious strategy that Smooth boarded another train, this time a transcontinental one, for the three-day run to Los Angeles. He knew that from one Headquarters to another, from city to city, word was passed of the

migrations of the titular enemies of society; and Smooth prided himself on being a sufficiently prominent figure in the realm of get-rich-quick workers to warrant police attention to him.

It would never do, he realized, with some plain-clothes "flatty" probably following him, to go openly in Los Angeles to the Trevelyan home. Consequently in that city it was from a public pay-station downtown that he called the private telephone number Arthur had given to him, and waited in some misgiving.

Lorraine Trevelyan glanced upward from her desk as her maid summoned her to the phone.

"He said his name didn't matter, Miss Lorraine," the maid informed her. "He said it was personal."

"But who can it be, who knows this number?" Lorraine wondered.

"It's probably one of them decorators, Miss," the maid speculated.

Then Lorraine remembered that she had given the private number to the foreman of the men who were preparing the armory hall for the Charity Ball. She lifted the receiver to her ear.

Smooth's soft voice, with its purr of New Yorkese sounding faintly sinister, came in response to her answer.

"This Miss Trevelyan?"

Lorraine acknowledged the identity.

"Miss *Lorraine* Trevelyan?"

"Of course—what is it, please?"

But Smooth wished first to be sure of his ground.

"Was you the sister of a lad with a monniker of Arthur Trevelyan?"

Lorraine gasped sharply at the mention of Arthur's name. There was a foreboding strangeness in this call, coming from an unknown speaker somewhere at the other end of the wire.

"Yes! I am—I *was* his sister—what is it?"

Smooth sensed the drama in what he was about to say. He leaned closer to the phone transmitter, subconsciously trying to impress his hearer at the other end with the importance of his role.

"Well, say!" he began. Abruptly he became aware of the delicacy of his mission, and he felt his clumsiness. "Listen! I'm a friend of his, see—he's a nice fellow—"

"Please!" Lorraine interrupted. "Oh, please! What about my brother? Who are you?"

Smooth was growing aware that he was blundering. He gulped, and then took the plunge.

"Well — I'm from Arthur!"

"Oh!"

Smooth heard the half-stunned, half-frightened exclamation echo over the wire. Lorraine could not believe what she had heard. It was like some grisly jest—some heartless prank suggestive of the cheap theatrics of a medium in a spiritualistic seance, with its claptrap of messages from the dead. Yet her very incredulity prompted her to volley questions at the unseen one separated from her by the telephone.

"Tell me! Where is he? How is he? Oh, it can't be true! Who *are* you? Tell me about him!"

"Wait, lady, wait! Shoot 'em one at a time!" Smooth implored. Her queries were too many for him to master, and he concentrated upon the first one.

"Why, he's—"

A shadow moved across the glass window-pane of the telephone booth and flickered in his eye. He checked his words and glanced cautiously outward. Beyond his full range of vision, he could see only the lower part of the man whose motion had thrown the shadow. His eyes noted the nondescript trousering, and then his glance halted, fascinated, at the man's shoes. They were blunt and heavy-soled, with square toes and the appearance of having carried their wearer over many miles of hard pavement. Smooth knew what those shoes meant; and correctly or otherwise, he assumed that the presence of the detective wearing them had something to do with him.

Abrupt caution overcame him. He lowered his voice as he continued:

"Listen, lady! I can't talk more now, see? Where'll you let me meet you, downtown?"

All eagerness now, discretion forgotten, Lorraine replied:

"Anywhere! When?"

Smooth chose the most crowded, conspicuous place he knew, conscious that in numbers lay comparative safety.

"How's the Toreador, in the lobby—at two-thirty, strike you?"

The name of the newest and most elaborate of the city's hotels "struck" Lorraine as satisfactorily as if he had mentioned the Elysian Fields, so great was her anxiety to hear more of Arthur from this mysterious caller. She assented impatiently.

"But how will I know you?" it occurred to her to ask.

This was a problem that Smooth had solved before under more intriguing, though less serious, circumstances.

"I'll be wearin' a white carnation. When you see me, give me a high sign, see?"

Lorraine saw, though she was a little doubtful of being able to deliver a high sign. She repeated his words: "The Toreador—two-thirty!" and let the receiver fall upon the hook as she sank back in her chair, shaken and trembling.

Smooth started to turn from the instrument, when he remembered the square-toed shoes. With elaborate carelessness he felt in his pockets for a coin, dropped it in the box, and asked for another number. When he heard the buzzing which signified that the line was "busy" he smiled with satisfaction and retrieved his nickel. Then he sauntered past the square-toed shoes without glancing at their wearer.

On the sidewalk outside, however, Smooth turned just in time to see the detective enter the booth from which Smooth had just emerged. Smooth grinned.

"He'll be askin' Central for the last number called on the line," he surmised. "When she tells him, he'll

be doin' some fancy guessin' why I wanted to talk with the Zoo!"

It was with no such amused composure, however, that Lorraine, in her room, tried to run over mentally what the conversation with Smooth might signify. Only the rendezvous—"The Toreador—two-thirty!"—was clearly fixed in her tumultuous thoughts. What could it all mean? From what point in the cosmic ether had come this cryptic message from her brother? Could Arthur really be alive? Where was he—?

Then, with "The Toreador—two-thirty!" ringing in her ears, she found relief in tears.

## CHAPTER XV

**S**MOOTH breezed across the broad granite treads of the entrance to the Toreador and jauntily entered the lobby.

He was confident that he had thrown off the encumbrance of the detective who had been following him. By a rapid series of operations that included a quick change from one street-car to another, a doubling back on his trail, an ascent in an office building elevator to an upper floor, a fortunate entrance of a descending car, and a hasty exit from a side corridor of the building, he was sure that he had eluded his "shadow."

He strolled leisurely across the lobby, serene in the confidence inspired by the warm brown and gray tones of his rough Scotch tweed, resplendent in which reposed a white carnation. As he passed through the clusters of men and women thronging the gathering-place he was on the alert for a conspicuous position where he might observe the passers-by, and where, when she arrived, Lorraine Trevelyan might observe him and his carnation.

He chose a mottled pillar toward the rear of the lobby, into whose white-streaked greens and blacks his costume blended nicely, and rested himself against it. His air was one of perfect poise and nonchalance.

Lorraine entered the lobby. The sudden change

from the outside glare of the sun to its subdued lighting confused her, and for a moment she paused, silhouetted against the doorway. She was all eagerness to find this man of the white carnation who had promised to give her word of her brother, and the significance of the flower she was to identify him by was her only clearly defined thought. She was aware of a blur of faces and she glanced uncertainly around.

Then, holding herself back to keep from breaking into a nervous run, she passed toward the hotel desk at the rear of the lobby. Her glance shifted momentarily from one man to another. The women she failed to notice.

Abruptly she found herself facing, last in the world whom she would have chosen to meet, three women with whom she was on terms of a surface friendship. One of these specially, a Mrs. Renshew, had been known even before her recent marriage for her acidulous tongue; now, with the greater freedom of matrimony, the sting of her innuendos was a byword. With her was Gertie Abercrombie, who clung still to the ingenuous outlook of her debutante year an uncertain number of seasons ago, and whose honeyed sweetness of tongue successfully failed to mask the venom behind her words. The third, Ruth Fitch, was of negligible quantity.

Lorraine suffered their kisses. Then—

“*My dear!*” gushed Miss Abercrombie, “so glad we’ve run into you! I’m just *dying* to hear all about your romance with Mr. Stevens! And I know you’re so *happy!*”

Lorraine admitted her happiness, though in her abstraction there was a casual note in her acceptance of their congratulations that did not pass without notice. Mrs. Renshew and Miss Abercrombie exchanged glances, and Mrs. Renshew offered:

"You're just in time to join us. We dropped in for a bit of tea."

The invitation was doubly unwelcome, both from its source and because of its interruption of her plans. Lorraine vaguely heard herself murmuring apologies and pleading an engagement.

"We mustn't interfere with dear Lorraine," Miss Abercrombie reminded Mrs. Renshew. "She's so *happy*—and Mr. Stevens probably is waiting—such an *ideal* match—"

As Gertie Abercrombie's voice dwindled uncertainly away, Lorraine managed to find a means of leaving them. Her cheeks were burning. She was aware that the incident had been an awkward one, and that her part in it had been ill-done. But it didn't matter, she told herself, in comparison with the importance of learning about her brother.

Meanwhile Smooth, loitering against the pillar and wondering whether the peach who had met the three janes was Arthur Trevelyan's sister, grew conscious of a prickling feeling along the back of his neck. He was being watched. The sixth sense which he had developed as a kid with the alley gang sounded an imperative warning.

Carefully he allowed his eyes to wander to one side and come to rest, with an unguarded flickering

of his eyelids, upon an individual leaning against the hotel desk. The latter's attire was unmistakable, from derby hat and salt and pepper suit, to heavy shoes. Smooth was certain that this was the hotel detective. He ran over his mental card index and recalled having met the detective officially several years ago, when he was in a jam—recalled, too, that the detective undoubtedly remembered him.

The pleasure that Smooth found in his heather-mixture costume suddenly went, and he was cold. He affected concern in his necktie, and out of the corner of his eye saw that the hotel detective still was stabbing him with his gaze.

Smooth shifted his weight from one foot to the other. The motion swung him slightly around the pillar. He slid his foot further to one side, and then by imperceptible degrees followed it with the other. Between his shoulder-blades he could feel the comforting presence of the pillar, which he was trying to interpose between himself and the baleful stare of the detective.

He shifted his feet again. To an uninitiated observer he would have seemed merely an individual whose feet were tired, and who was seeking only to ease them by changing their position. But inch by inch he continued to maneuver until he was sure the pillar now blocked the detective's view.

Immediately he scampered down the corridor and around a corner. There he stopped, and sank into a chair, relieved.

There Lorraine found him. The white carnation loomed gigantically before her, like a beacon to a

distressed mariner, and she walked toward Smooth for a few paces in anxiety to confirm her thought that this was the man she was seeking.

Then fears overcame her. She realized that for the first time in her life she was about to hold conversation with a man under unconventional circumstances. While this in itself would not have dismayed her, she was beset with the additional possibility that more than one man might chance to be wearing a white carnation. It was such a slender clew.

Smooth looked upward, and saw the peach who had met the three janes. She seemed like the kind of a girl Arthur Trevelyan would have for a sister. His fingers caressed the blossom in his lapel suggestively.

The signal convinced Lorraine. She nerved herself to take the chance, and nodding, smiled at Smooth. Instantly he was on his feet, all gallantry, and bowed. Yet he warned himself to be careful. He knew of such creatures as "flirt cops," and she might be one of these. He groped for an assurance.

"It's a pleasure, Miss—Miss—"

He waited for her to supply the identifying name.

"Miss Trevelyan," Lorraine returned. Then, for her own conviction:

"And you're from?"

"From your brother, Arthur," Smooth replied.

Lorraine's face gladdened, and her eyes became radiant. She clasped her hands together impulsively. She might have been a school-girl delighted with an invitation to her first party.

"Then he's truly alive—*alive?*"

Her voice, almost in hysteria, rose at the news that seemed too good to be true. She moved a step nearer to him and looked up into his face, in an ecstasy of suspense for his next words.

Smooth shook his head slightly in warning lest she attract attention by her emotion. Here was a Jane, he told himself, who might go off her nut if he did not temper his phrases and hold her to earth.

"Sure he's alive," he reassured her. "He's the liveliest guy you ever knew."

"It's too wonderful! It's glorious! I—I *love* you for telling me!"

With a heart overflowing in gratitude, Lorraine seized his hand and pressed it between hers. Smooth tugged to release his imprisoned member.

"Aw—say!" he protested in embarrassment.

At this moment Mrs. Renshew, in the tea-room beyond the corridor, turned her attention from the slice of lemon she was squeezing into her cup to stare, entranced, at the spectacle visible through an archway. She concentrated on the sight for a moment and then generously invited her companions to enjoy the sensation with her.

As if rehearsed, the three women held their gaze steadily upon the distant vista of Lorraine and Smooth at the instant when she was clasping his hand. Then their heads turned, and they glanced each from one to the other.

Mrs. Renshew was the first to speak.

"I *knew* she came here to meet a man—I could tell it from her manner."

She accented her observation with a last emphatic pressure upon the lemon.

"And her engagement just announced," added Ruth Fitch. She pursed her lips in disapproval—possibly in reaction to the tartness of Mrs. Renshew's lemon.

Gertie Abercrombie smiled sweetly. She was busily engaged with biscuit and marmalade.

"Such a *quaint* character—" another dab of marmalade—"probably one of her settlement workers—"a tentative tasting of the biscuit—"or one of Mr. Stevens' friends—"

Mrs. Renshew's laughter tinkled like thin glass-ware.

"Oh, Gertie—you do say the funniest things!"

"But you don't suppose—" Gertie's voice came in a hushed undertone of sudden shock—"that she would come here to meet *another* man?"

"H-m-m-m," Mrs. Renshew sniffed. "Still waters run deep, you know."

"Look!"

It was Ruth Fitch who exclaimed. The synchronized heads of the three musketeers of scandal turned again toward Lorraine and Smooth Sullivan, standing close together for all the world like two at a trysting place.

"Quick—please, oh, please, tell me all about him!"

Lorraine was pleading this, oblivious to all the universe except of her own anxieties. Smooth was becoming increasingly fearful that Lorraine, when she learned all he had to tell her, might prove unequal to the strain and precipitate a scene. He

looked uneasily around. The hotel detective was not in sight.

"Listen, lady," Smooth suggested. "I can't tell you the whole works now—besides, I got some stuff I want you to lamp."

Under his breath, in jerky, half-completed sentences, he told Lorraine to meet him in one of the public drawing-rooms on the mezzanine floor.

"I'll blow on up," he informed her. "You trail along in a minute, see?"

Lorraine nodded. To the Tea Triumvirate a palpable assignation had been arranged. Before their scandalized and hungry eyes Smooth was seen to leave Lorraine and pass toward the entrance to the elevators, a short distance down the corridor. When his form had vanished in an upward car, Lorraine, unconscious of subterfuge, followed soon after in another.

There was a gasp at the tea-table when the distorted significance of Smooth's tactics became apparent.

"Of all things!" This from Ruth Fitch. "I never saw anything so bold!"

"But, maybe," Gertie Abercrombie interposed in treacle tones, "maybe she's gone upstairs to visit a *girl friend*."

Her meaning smile belied her words, and Mrs. Renshew found her cue.

"Right after him? Oh, my *dear!*"

Gertie was in haste to leave no room for misunderstanding of her policy of speaking no evil.

"I didn't *say* she was going to meet a girl," she corrected. "I said *maybe*—"

"Oh!" Ruth Fitch shrugged her shoulders. "Well, maybe—"

In the drawing-room upstairs Smooth was pacing the floor impatiently as Lorraine entered. She ran toward him, and he led her to a secluded corner of the room, where, upon a divan, reposed the battered suitcase which he had brought across the continent.

"Now you sit here," began Smooth, "and I'll give you the low-down on the whole lay-out."

"Only tell me about Arthur," she implored, as Smooth placed himself beside her and rested his hands upon his knees. "Tell me all about him. Where is he? Why has he sent you, instead of coming to me directly?"

"Well, you see—"

How to tell this swell jane that her brother was doing time?

"It's like this." Smooth started anew. "There's a reason why—you don't mind my tellin' you, do you?"

His reticence was a presage of ill news. Lorraine sensed this and her heart sank. But she drove forward to meet what must be faced.

"Tell me—tell me! It doesn't matter whether I mind. Tell me about him!"

"He's in prison."

The bald statement of fact came like a caroling chorus, instead of being fraught with the dread significance which Smooth had feared. Thus Lorraine learned again how much smaller are the realities of

misfortune than the chimeras which the imagination pictures.

“Prison! Then I can go to him?”

It was more exclamation than question, but Smooth was quick to head off this new idea.

“That wouldn’t ever do! You mustn’t go near him—take it from me!”

“But why?” Lorraine already had visioned herself in reunion with Arthur, even in the chill atmosphere of the penitentiary. “Why can’t I see him? Don’t they allow visitors?”

“They allow ‘em all right. It ain’t that. But Arthur told me particular to make you lay off.”

“I don’t understand.” Her hand wavered in the air to express her confusion.

“No more could I, until he doped it out for me. Then I got his angle. This brother of yours is a good kid—”

“I know—I know he is,” she interrupted.

“None better. He got himself in a jam that wasn’t his fault. It was all against him, and he was wise to the idea that it didn’t do any good to squeal. So he took his medicine like a man.”

Out of Sullivan’s rambling mixture of jargon and words which conveyed a meaning to her, Lorraine gathered only that Arthur had been imprisoned for an offense which he had not committed.

“But why didn’t he let us know—let us help him?” she wondered.

“That’s what I’m tellin’ you,” Smooth argued. “This kid ain’t like me, see? If I lose, I do my trick in the pen, an’ there’s no harm done. But Arthur’s

different. He dopes it out, he tells me, that his old man has helped him too much as it is, an' he ain't goin' to yell for more from pa. I get his drift an' here's how I size up his play—that so long as everybody's got him figured for a dead one, he'll let it go that way an' do time under this other bird's name. Then when he's discharged, he figures, he'll get busy, make a man of hisself, an' then come around for the glad hand from his folks."

Smooth thrust his fingers through his hair to relieve the strain ensuing from his long explanation. But still one thing Lorraine could not understand.

"But now that I know about him," she contested, "why shouldn't I explain it all to father, then go to Arthur, make him a little happier while he is in prison, and work to get him out? Surely, if I can prove that an innocent man is being imprisoned—"

"That's just the point," Smooth interjected. "Accordin' to what Arthur tells me, an' from what I gather, that's just what you *can't* do—prove him innocent. It's an open an' shut case against him. That's why he talks about not wantin' to bring additional disgrace on his folks—lettin' everybody know that he's a jailbird."

"As if we cared!" she scoffed.

"Yeh, but he cares. Listen, Miss Trevelyan! The boy's got the right idea. If you people, with your old man's—excuse me, lady—with Mr. Trevelyan's dough, get busy an' work wires, an' get the boy out, he'll be right back where he was, dependin' on his pa. The way he's got it framed, he's goin' to be out on

his own, an' if he makes good he's that much more sure of hisself. See?"

Lorraine saw. She saw the tremendous change, the overwhelming transition through which her brother had gone to bring him to this point of view. She caught herself almost being thankful for the fortune which had brought Arthur to a prison cell to work this miracle of manhood in him. Hot tears of mingled happiness and regret for the necessity of such a drastic cure began to make lines of moisture on her eyelids.

Then the thought of the cell, and what imprisonment must mean to Arthur's carefree, effervescent spirit, drove away the happiness.

"To think, though, that he's in prison! Oh, I don't mean the disgrace he thinks about—*we* know that he's not bad—but the years of confinement! Nothing could be worth that torture to him!"

Smooth struggled to express the rude philosophy to whose glimmering precepts he had clung.

"Lemme tell you," he groped, "I know you think I'm a crook—"

"Oh, no!" she protested. "At least, not a bad crook."

"Yes, I am," he insisted. "I don't kid myself that I'm one of these victims of misfortune. When I gyp some bird outta his dough, an' get pinched, I ain't got a kick comin'."

"An' I'm on the level, too. I never got a dime selling' phoney stock to widows an' orphans. My meat's the man with larceny in his heart hisself—the penny-inchin' tightwad that's tryin' to get somethin'

for nothin'. All I do is make him think he's goin' to put somethin' over either on me or somebody else, an' then I take him.

"An' that's fifty-fifty, see? That's fair enough. An' that's what I'm gettin' at about your brother. I don't know much about religion, but a fellow does a lot of thinkin' when he's in the pen, an' I got a hunch that fifty-fifty is the whole scheme of—of—well, of everythin'. We all gotta give an' take."

Out of his welter of words Lorraine gathered Smooth's firm though intangible belief in compensation—retribution.

"Say that Arthur's innocent," Smooth continued. "We know he wasn't mixed up in that diamon' clean-up. Say he's gettin' a tough deal for somethin' that wasn't his fault. But he had a lot of soft livin' that he didn't earn, an' he got away with murder while your pa was good to him. Now he's got to make up for it. That's where the fifty-fifty comes in.

"You can't beat the game, Miss Trevelyan. For a long time the breaks in the play came his way. He's got to stick it out durin' his losing streak, an' then he'll be even with the game again. See? See? Believe me, he'll be better off for it."

Lorraine was silent with her thoughts. It was an amazing thing, she considered, that this uncouth sharpster should have brought home so vividly the old truth which she had forgotten: "As ye sow, so shall ye reap." The whirlwind which Arthur was reaping was only justice—the working of an inexorable law.

A sense of resignation, of faith in the ultimate

benefit embodied in her brother's ordeal, came over her. She was strengthened by a sureness that Arthur, just as "a fellow does a lot of thinkin' when he's in the pen," had found himself. It was a consolation, bittersweet, to feel that the years of regrets had not been empty ones.

As she drained the last of her tea Mrs. Renshew glanced at her watch and remarked:

"How the time flies—and what an absorbing visit Lorraine Trevelyan must be having with her *girl* friend!"

"Isn't it curious!" replied Gertie Abercrombie. "I must ask her fiance, Mr. Stevens, all about it."

"Do, dear," said Mrs. Renshew sweetly. "I'm sure that he'll be interested."

## CHAPTER XVI

**S**O IT came to Lorraine that Arthur, preserving an incognito in prison rather than revert to his boyhood habit of calling for family help, was fulfilling a destiny of whose structure she could only glimpse a fragmentary detail here and there. It was impossible for her to grasp the scope of the finished work, or yet assist in its construction. She could only do what seemed immediately of aid, conscious that even the blunders might play a part in the divine design.

“I suppose that Arthur’s right.”

She turned to Smooth Sullivan with this admission. Its finality still had its sting, and for a moment her lips quavered as she continued:

“It does seem hard—that there should be all this suffering—”

Smooth, who had been delighted with the apparent success of his delicacy in breaking the news of Arthur’s imprisonment to Lorraine, was beset with new fears that she was going to yield to the tumult of her emotions. He cast about in his mind for something which would repress the threatened flow of tears. It happened that he noticed the suitcase he had brought.

“Say!” he exclaimed. “I belong in the funny-house! A big city’s no place for me!”

Smooth rapped mournfully at his head. Lorraine stared at him inquisitorily.

"I'm just a dumb-bell, lady," he apologized. "Here I chase all across the country with this bag to show you, an' then I forget all about it! I'm *good*, I am!"

"Why, what is in it?" Lorraine asked. She had a premonition that more poise-shattering news was still to come. "Is it Arthur's?"

"In a way it's his—an' more than that."

Smooth fumbled at the clasps and freed the strap. He raised the lid, disclosing a litter of odds and ends of discarded feminine apparel. Lorraine watched him, fascinated at the possibility of what was to be discovered in the bag.

"Now here's a dress—" Smooth began. He lifted the garment from the case and held it awkwardly before him.

Lorraine took the dress from his hands and straightened its wrinkled folds. It was the gown that Gilda had worn the night when the two girls had met. The inerasable memories came surging back. She could picture Gilda's blond loveliness as she stood, with Arthur's arm around her, while Arthur announced their marriage and faced his father's stormy wrath.

"How did you get it?" Lorraine breathed. Everything depended on Smooth's answer.

Rapidly Smooth sketched his efforts to find Gilda in New York. He told how he had learned of Gilda's accident, how a search of hospital records had at last located the place to which she was taken, and how, through a nurse with whom Gilda had warmed to friendship, he had learned of the room-

ing-house to which Gilda had moved from the hospital. There was a hiatus in his narrative that Lorraine, fingering the frail fabric of the dinner gown, failed to notice.

"You didn't find any direct trace of her?" she asked.

"No, ma'am," Smooth responded, "but—"

"How I wish I could have known more of her," Lorraine mused. "She was so sweet—so natural and genuine. She would have been my sister truly. It's strange—we meet, and love someone. Then an incident occurs—a little jostling that separates our ways, and we go on, and live, and have only the illusion of what might have been. We're like stars, that kiss as their orbits come in momentary contact, and then swing off into infinite space."

"I know what you mean, lady. A few times there's been a bimbo I've wanted for a side-kick—but he's had to beat it, or get pinched, or fall for a skirt, an' somethin's always happened."

"She wouldn't have come to us for help," Lorraine surmised correctly, "but I *wish* she had let us know where to reach her. Where do you suppose she's gone—back to the stage?"

"Well, later, possibly. You see—"

Again Smooth was prevented from telling what was on his mind.

"Then couldn't we find her through the theatrical agencies?"

"It would be a long hunt, Miss Trevelyan. Like as not, she's changed her name, if she is in the show business. Names to those people are like last year's

glad rags—easy to change for somethin' more catchy."

The hopelessness of the impasse was overbearing. Lorraine plucked experimentally at a seam that had been stitched to cover the ravages of wear.

"I wonder why she left this dress behind her. Surely she could not have so large a supply of clothes."

"She couldn't help herself, Miss," Smooth stated. "I got this stuff from the landlady that was holdin' it."

"But why should the landlady hold her clothes?" Lorraine never had come in contact with that device for enforcing payment of lodging accounts.

"Well, there was a bill—"

"Oh—didn't she have any money?"

"She had some, all right, for a while. You see, she had to go back to the hospital, an' then her money ran out, after she returned to this furnished room, with her baby—"

"Her *what*?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Smooth turned again to the suitcase. He brushed to one side the negligee, now sadly worn and frayed, that had been Gilda's during the halcyon days of her honeymoon. Reticently, as if afraid of an indelicacy in exposing the intimate belongings, he searched through Gilda's former possessions until he unearthed a tiny garment that showed the results of many weary hours over a washtub.

He held the rumpled fabric before him awkwardly. It was a baby's nainsook dress, pretty even

in its disarray. All the tenderness of its maker for the wee person who was to wear it had been sewn into the diminutive sleeves and lace-edged wristbands.

Wide-eyed, deeply stirred, Lorraine pressed the baby's dress between her hands. Her throat ached with the sharpness of what it all meant. She held its cool folds against her face, and a lingering echo of a gurgling laughter and a baby's cooing voice seemed to peal faintly in her ears. She closed her eyes tightly to shut out flashes of visions of Arthur—Gilda—their baby. . . .

At length she forced herself to glance at Smooth, who was mingling diffidence and self-importance in his embarrassment. Her eyes were huge question-marks.

"His?" she breathed softly.

Smooth nodded. He watched as her lips formed an inquiry, so quietly spoken that he sensed, rather than heard, its meaning.

"Four years ago," he told her.

"And there's been no word of her since?" Lorraine asked.

"No, ma'am. She never came back for the clothes."

The knowledge that of her brother's flesh and blood, only the inanimate dress remained as a tangible point of contact for her, was too much for her already overtaut nerves. With a sudden sweep of relief, the flood-gates of her emotion burst open, and she wept, the warm, comforting tears bathing and soothing her straining eyes, and dropping unheeded upon the dress lying in her lap.

Smooth Sullivan, wise in the ways of women, was content at first to let the tears fall. But soon he became aware that his collar was tight. He fingered it nervously. His coat, triumph of a tailor's tape, suddenly had grown bulky at the neck, and he shrugged his shoulders to shift its position. She was sobbing gently now, and the situation was one difficult for him to face.

"Aw, say, Miss Trevelyan!" he protested. "You mustn't take on like that!"

Lorraine nodded in acquiescence and tried to summon a smile, but the effort was woefully a failure. Smooth was increasingly uncomfortable. Then inspiration came.

He groped again into the suitcase and brought out still another object. He held it before him speculatively.

"This here, now—would it be for a boy or a girl?"

The question—the realization that she had no knowledge even of Arthur's baby's sex, roused Lorraine from her thoughts. She hastily shook the last tear from her face and looked at what Smooth was showing her. In his hand, ridiculously small contrasted against his thick fingers, was a shoe—a soft, pearl-buttoned boot, whose scuffed toe spoke eloquently of hours when its wearer, first learning to crawl, had dragged it along the floor.

Lorraine took the shoe and held it in her hand. An explorative finger caressed the impressions made by the toes that had wiggled beneath the leather. She shook her head hopelessly.

"I don't know," she responded, half in hysterical laughter. "Isn't it odd? I learn that I'm an aunt

—but I don't know whether I have a nephew or a niece."

Then appreciation of what Smooth Sullivan had accomplished for her—how he had hunted her out, unselfishly, possibly at the risk of his own unstable affairs, to carry out his promise to her brother, drove away the poignant wonderings. Impulsively she placed her hand on his and said:

"I can't tell you how grateful I am! If there's any way to repay you—"

Her warm touch, mingled with the softness of her voice, threw Smooth from his carefully attained aplomb. He shifted his feet and interrupted:

"Aw, that's all right—"

He gestured magnificently. Something of a knight who slays dragons for maidens was in his manner as he continued:

"It ain't every fellow who gets a chance to do somethin' for a lady like you. Why, I'm honored, Miss."

But he found words scanty along this theme, and hastily switched his thoughts.

"But, say!"

Lorraine glanced quickly at him as she noted the interrogation in his tone.

"You'll remember not to spill the beans?"

The transition was too abrupt for her to follow. She repeated his words blankly.

Smooth caught the lack of understanding in her expression. Mentally he kicked himself for having phrased his query so crudely. Then he tried again.

"You know—pipe it off that the boy is up the river?"

Lorraine's smile told him that he had made his meaning clear.

"I won't," she promised. "If I could only be sure that my silence will be of help to him. You're sure he's going to be released?"

"There's nothin' to it, Miss," Smooth replied. Now he was on firm ground again. "It's all cut and dried. He'll get a reduction for good behavior, an' be showin' up one of these days before you know it."

The hope that showed in the swell jane's eyes repaid Smooth fully for his mission to her. He felt himself expanding again, now that the strain of breaking the news was over. He cast about for a means of making his departure a graceful one.

"There's nothin' more I can do? Just say the good word."

"Nothing," Lorraine replied. "You've been wonderful."

Smooth started to back away, twirling his hat around a finger.

"Well, oh, reservoir, as they say."

"Oh, reservoir," Lorraine responded. She watched as he worked his way toward the door. She found herself liking immensely this worldly, unethical, lumbering creature, so wise to the frailties of his fellows, so anxious lest he betray a softness beneath his surface sophistication.

At the door he turned and glanced backward at her. Their eyes met. In a way which Smooth would have found far too ethereal for articulation, they exchanged a message of sympathy and a bond

of fellowship across the chasm that separated their lives.

Lorraine touched her fingers to her lips and tossed a kiss toward him. It was her thank-offering, and Smooth so gave it reception. Nevertheless, it was with confused thoughts of rose-covered bowers, his general unworthiness, and vague ideas of reforming for her sake, that he gulped to lessen his blood-pressure, and groped his way toward the elevators.

In the lobby below, Smooth found himself face to face once more with his titular enemy, the hotel detective. But now Smooth had lost all reason for fear. The damsel of his dreams had buckled on his spurs, and more of an ogre than a dick in a derby would not have caused him to quail.

Smooth nodded to the detective in casual familiarity. He paused, as if to pass the time of day. The detective regarded the confidence man with dour suspicion.

"There's nothin' doin', Smooth," the detective warned. "The lid's on, an' the chief's put the Indian sign on grafters like you. You better beat it before they run you in as a vag."

Smooth smiled and shook his head confidently.

"I'm not worryin'. I'm only a tourist; I am out here for my health, see? I'm not workin' any lay."

Smooth stared at a point on the detective's blue serge lapel. His focused gaze attracted the other's attention and the detective shifted his glance. When Smooth was sure that he had achieved the effect he desired, he reached forward with meticulous care and brushed away an imaginary bit of dust.

"Well, I'm just warnin' you, that's all," the detective remarked.

"Oh, sure! Just a good-natured pal," Smooth returned with heavy sarcasm.

"Say! You're gettin' pretty fresh!" The detective was unused to such effrontery from those whom he was accustomed to inspire with fear.

"Who, me?" Smooth's tone was bland innocence itself. "*Me* fresh? Why, I'm just a feelin' friendly, because I like everybody. Lemme prove it to *yuh*."

Smooth plucked his white carnation from his lapel and glanced quickly at it. It had been the crest upon his helmet with which he had ridden to tournament, and it had served its purpose well. Before the officer could interfere, Smooth grasped the detective's lapel, thrust the stem of the blossom through a button-hole, adjusted the "set" of the blue serge coat collar, flicked off another invisible bit of debris, and stepped back a pace to survey the effect of the decoration on the dignitary.

"There you are, old dear, as we say in London. Couldn't be better. See you later."

Then, before the outraged arm of the law could express his indignation or retaliate, Smooth swung on his heel, gave a self-congratulatory tap to his hat to settle it more in place, strode jauntily across the lobby, and vanished through the revolving doors. The flow of sidewalk traffic swept him up. With it he drifted, a roving buccaneer with all flags flying and each gun-port manned.

Left to herself, Lorraine Trevelyan lingered over the suitcase, reluctant to put away from sight the

priceless souvenirs. She folded carefully the nain-sook gown, pressing out its wrinkles upon her knees. She sought and found the mate to the tiny shoe, and placed them side by side in the palm of her hand. Her eyes grew larger as she listened mentally to the story that the shoes related.

At length, entranced by the thoughts within her, she slowly packed the suitcase and closed its clasps. Moving like one walking in a dream, she crossed the room and descended the elevators. Still in the glow of the spell which Smooth's words had cast about her, she passed across the lobby and onto the street.

The suitcase in her hand was the most conspicuous object to be seen as Gertie Abercrombie called Mrs. Renshew's attention to her passage.

"What *would* Tom Stevens say?" she speculated. She knew, and Mrs. Renshew guessed, that Stevens soon would have a chance to satisfy her wonder.

## CHAPTER XVII

THE lingering shadows of an eastern twilight softened the harsh outlines of the prison yard. The gray, rough-quarried stones of the buildings, the forbidding heights of the all-surrounding walls, took on a kindlier tone in the touch of dusk.

A gong sounded. As at a signal, an arc-light overhead began to sputter and then became fixed in a permanency of glare. The cone of hard radiance it threw illuminated the quadrangle formed by the adjoining buildings in the foreground and at each side, and by the exterior wall beyond which ran the river.

Coldly barren, the flint-covered expanse of the yard was blotched with disks of light from the arcs which sprang into luminance in quick succession to the first. The reflected beams picked out the exteriors of the prison buildings. Nearby, to the right, was the broom factory, closed for the night. Farther away was the dining-hall, one corner of which jutted into the yard at abrupt angles. Beyond that was the river wall, upon the parapet of which a prison guard paced monotonously, yet alert, along his beat from the dining-hall to a sentry box perched at a far corner, to the left.

The clamor of the gong had scarcely ceased when a door of the dining-hall, at the rear of the yard near the river wall, swung open and another guard appeared. The prisoners had finished their evening

meal and now were being marshaled back to the tiers of cells in which they were to spend another of the endless nights.

As the guard stepped to one side, the head of the file of marching men emerged from the dining-hall. They were not in lock-step. Some semblance of humaneness had done away with that degrading device, and they were walking briskly, with only a superficial effort at unison of step, with the guard at one side of the convict at the head of the column.

The guard pacing the parapet of the wall slowed in his beat while the column of prisoners was in sight. He shifted his rifle from one shoulder to the other and watched with easy poise. It was among the chief of his duties to see that no unit of that line of herded men parted from its fellows.

The head of the column reached the corner of the dining-hall building. Long habit made it unnecessary for the guard to give instructions. Automatically the bell-weather of the gray-clad flock turned around the corner. His follower traced his leader's footsteps, and the procession continued. This night there was to be an after-supper motion picture show, and the men moved at an accelerated pace.

The tail of the queue now also emerged from the dining-hall, and the second of the guards in charge of the movement of the men stepped out in the wake of the last. He reached backward, without looking, and grasped the edge of the outward-swinging door. Still acting by habit, he swung it, as he thought, closed behind him. He failed to note that a wedge of wood, inserted by someone at the hinge, caused

the door to be checked in its motion and to rebound outward again.

Three-Finger Murphy, as he neared the corner of the building, nudged cautiously at the elbow of Arthur Trevelyan, who immediately preceded him. Arthur, without turning his head, nodded in response to the signal.

Not so conspicuously as to be noticed, Arthur slackened his stride. An appreciable interval grew between him and the man ahead as he approached the corner. The distance lengthened.

From his position on the wall, the guard on the parapet failed to observe the break in the line. The foreshortened perspective carried the illusion that Arthur and his predecessor were closely placed.

Another step, and Arthur would reach the corner. It was the moment for which they had planned. There was agony in the thought that the guard in the rear might be observing his actions, yet he dared not turn his head lest the motion arouse suspicion.

Everything depended upon what lay around that corner. If their opportunity still existed, the campaign they had outlined, move by move, their whispered scheming, might bring success. If not—but the alternative of waiting for more interminable days for another chance was too discouraging to contemplate. Arthur braced his nerves, caught his breath sharply, and rounded the angle. Close at his heels was Murphy.

Within a few feet of the corner, beyond the range of vision of the guard at the rear, was a large packing-case that had been remade to serve as a recep-

tacle for the rakes and brooms with which the quadrangle was kept in order. It was upon the proximity of this catch-all to the building wall that their strategies were based. A few scant inches, to allow the raising of the tool-box, formed a precious interstice against the masonry.

The crucial moment came. Arthur, as the new angle of vision arose, saw the column of gray-clad backs before him, flanked by the leading guard. No faces were turning backward. The man next in line ahead of him was several feet distant. Here was his chance.

He flowed, rather than jumped, from the line of march to the shelter of the tool-box, and threw himself full length into the narrow space between the wall and wooden frame. The next moment his breath was crushed momentarily from him by the silent impact of Murphy's body as his accomplice in the conspiracy dropped upon him. For a space the two were motionless, scarce daring to breathe.

Then the convict behind Murphy also swung around the corner. The man was intent upon the evening's entertainment soon to come. So great an importance had the prospect of a movie diversion assumed that the marcher failed to notice the disappearance of Murphy and Arthur. Still on the blind side of the corner the guard at the tail of the line was all in ignorance of what had happened.

Fearful for the success of their tactics, Arthur and Murphy remained inert until the first heart-pounding strain of their attempt had passed. Then Murphy shifted his position to relieve his aching arms and legs. Arthur turned slightly on his side.

His lungs were bursting, and the inrush of air at his first full breath carried the shock of an icy plunge.

From where he lay, he found one eye pressed against the boards of the tool-box. A faint ray of light penetrated through the increasing darkness and caught attention. He moved ever so slightly, and peered through the crevice between two boards.

On the other side of the box was etched, where a corresponding interval between the planks permitted the play of illumination, a thin long line of light reflected from the arc nearby. Intermittent flickers of sharp outline and shadow told of the legs of the marchers moving beyond.

In the brief interval consumed by the passage of the line, what seemed like an eternity transpired before Arthur detected the darker hue of the blue-trousered legs of the rear guard passing at the end of the line. The rasping scuffle of the rough-shod feet was growing dimmer. The receding footsteps became muffled. There was the metallic crash of a door slamming somewhere beyond. Then quietness, broken by the measured cadence of a patrol upon a nearer parapet.

The beating of Arthur's traitor heart was not to be stilled. Dread that the absence of the two from the line would be discovered, and that they would be trapped behind the box, dragged ignominiously from their covert, and subjected to the scalding scorn of thwarted efforts, assailed him. It seemed certain that the watcher upon the wall would hear the thunderous pounding within his chest.

Murphy's nudge spurred him into action. Better

a bullet from the guard than to lie and be subjected to harrowing possibilities.

With his elbows serving as a fulcrum, Arthur pried his body from the vise-like grip of the wall and box, and edged himself gingerly toward the opening at one end. So softly that motion was imperceptible, he thrust his head forward.

The quadrangle was exposed before him. It was bare of occupants. The coast, so far, was clear, for the guard upon the wall that skirted the railroad tracks on the landward side of the prison, now that the convicts had been taken to their cells, was propping himself for rest in the interior of his sentry-box.

Hastily Arthur emerged from the protection of the tool box. Crouched, on hands and knees, he crept along its side. He melted into the obscurity of the half-light. When he had reached the corner around which he had taken the all-important step at what seemed centuries ago, he paused. He beckoned backward.

Murphy responded to the signal. He was well content to let Arthur take the initiative in carrying out the actual development of their escape. Following Arthur's example, he slid himself toward his leader's heels.

Arthur profited by the niche between two blocks of stone to glimpse, with one eye, the perilous path ahead. The guard on the river wall was pacing toward his sentry-box, and his back was turned. The arc-lights beat less sharply on the narrow space of ground at the side of the building. The way was open.

Arthur's body glided around the corner. He hugged the masonry as he moved, bent double. Murphy synchronized his action with that of Arthur. The two, creeping like slightly grayer ghosts against the gray monotone of the yard, worked their way toward their goal at the river wall.

Abruptly Arthur halted and threw himself face down upon the flinted yard. His movement was automatic, for his ears had heard Murphy's shoe scratch the side of the wall, and he had seen the guard pause in walking his beat.

The guard, silhouetted against the blackness of the sky, swung his rifle into the cradle of his arms. He turned sharply toward the sound. There was an ominous click as he cocked his firing-piece.

The fugitives were inert, motionless. Each fleeting moment added to the suspense of what must be the instant of discovery.

There was a stabbing pain in Arthur's palms that he did not notice. His finger-nails were pressing into the clenched flesh so sharply that the blood began to flow.

The guard poised his rifle. Its muzzle pointed toward the lurking figures against the wall. For a moment its aim was steady. Then the barrel wavered, and swept on.

"I'm goin' to quit this job," the guard told himself. "It's got me where I'm seein' things that ain't."

He resumed his stride. The exultation of peril was over. Arthur was spent and shaken as he watched the sentry march away. He was acutely conscious of a cold sweat coming in reaction to the

revulsion of emotion. But he knew he must not yield to weakness—must press forward to conclusion, toward success or obliteration.

He tensed his muscles for the final dash which would take him to the shelter of the door of the dining-hall, so carefully left ajar. He felt Murphy's hand press at his ankle, and moved his foot slightly in answer.

Then he gathered himself to his hands and feet. He looked once more toward the guard. The figure of the watchman was smaller now, outlined vaguely against the sentry-box at the distant corner of the wall.

Only the faint sputter of the arc-light was audible as the two ran rapidly along the wall. Even Murphy, stocky and ponderous, acquired a lightness of foot in the emergency. They reached the door. Arthur, still in the lead, swirled around it and sank to the ground. The next moment Murphy was at his side. They paused, squatting in Indian fashion, to catch their breaths and take advantage of the haven offered by the triangle of refuge which the door formed as it swung against the river wall.

Now spurred with a reckless courage inspired by their miraculous escape from exposure so little a while before, Arthur groped at his feet for the man-hole cover that was to be the next landmark in their struggle for freedom. Its cold surface met his touch. He forced his fingers, regardless of the pain protested by the bruised flesh, between the cover and its iron rim.

He tugged carefully, but forcefully, at the metal. It yielded ever so slightly. There was a nerve-

chilling rasp as the rusted segments parted. Then the lid came clear, and Arthur raised it on edge.

He held the lid to one side, and motioned to Murphy. Cautiously, gradually, Murphy lowered himself into the aperture. In a moment he had disappeared. In another moment Arthur had swung his feet into the tunnel also, and started to lower his body downward.

A dank, musty odor assailed his nostrils as he began to enter the storm-drain into which the man-hole opened. One hand, braced against the brick-work, felt the moisture that fringed the surface of the drain. Below him he could hear Murphy's body scraping against the walls of the tunnel.

Painfully, with straining muscle, Arthur lowered himself into the drain. At last his foot touched a ledge and gave him place to rest his body. The weight of the manhole cover pressed at his wrist tendons. He flexed his arm and allowed the lid to drop slowly back into place. A moment of torture came when his fingers, gripping the edge of the cover, were caught between the iron and the rim. They were being torn and crushed—it seemed apparent that they would be sheared off by the pressure of the weight. He gritted his teeth, forced himself to stand the agony, and pulled his fingers, bleeding and bruised, free from their imprisonment.

He found that he could stand erect in the vertical shaft of the drain. He explored the bottom with his toe, and located the beginning of the transverse section. He stooped, thrust his arms forward in the encloaking darkness, and then entered the horizontal shaft head-first.

Somewhere ahead, he heard, was Murphy. Somewhere, too, ahead was water, for he was aware of a soft splash. The drain sloped downward as he followed its path.

After the first few feet he discovered himself forced to abandon efforts to creep on hands and knees. The diameter of the drain was growing smaller. Soon it was necessary to lie flat and make a snail-like progress by propelling himself ahead with foot-thrusts against the sides of the tunnel. His shoulders were constricted. The air, too, was growing foul.

Almost, then, he screamed from sheer shock. Abruptly a living, scrambling, furry creature had brushed from nowhere against his face. He struck wildly at it and his hand encountered the harsh bristles of a sewer-rat. As the animal scampered over his back and backward along the drain he was engulfed by a paralyzing nausea.

When he had pulled himself together it was to grope forward with a desperate abandon. His hands, stretched ahead, were abraded by the roughness of the cement that lined the drain. Suddenly he was conscious of a cooling relief from the pin-pricks that occurred with each arduous foot of progress.

He moved a hand tentatively to confirm the dulled impression telegraphed by the nerve-tips of his fingers. There was no doubt. His hands were dabbling in a pool of water of which he could detect no further rim.

The probabilities were appalling. He splashed experimentally. When the echoing reverberations

of the falling drops had died, there was no further sound.

"Murphy!" he whispered. No answer came.

"Murphy!" This time he was reckless of unwanted hearers.

Still only the dying echoes came to him.

On the farther side of that pool of wetness, he wondered, was—what? Probably the dead body of his companion adventurer, lying at the bottom of the drain-pit, waiting to tell him.

He was in a hysteria of doubt. Somehow, by what devious windings he could not tell, he knew that the drain opened into the river. But what traps lay between him and that flowing refuge he could only surmise. The heavy silence hinted of deaths unspeakable.

Better to return and face discovery, risk the fire of the guards in one mad, suicidal dash across the prison yard, than to be drowned in a trap, like the rat that had startled him. He shrank from the water's edge and tried to shove his body backward, as a crawfish advances by retreating.

And then he found that he could *not* return. The same narrowness of passageway that had cramped his shoulders now closed in with almost animate malice, and he discovered that he was only wedging his body ineradicably in the narrow tube. There was no room to retrace his path. To remain where he was meant inevitably a slow starvation. He could only go ahead.

He resumed his position at the edge of the water. Slowly he forced his body forward until shoulders and arms were below the surface. His hands,

moving like tentacles, touched the bottom of the drain. His head was thrown back upon his neck at an acute angle to keep his nostrils above the water.

He filled his lungs with the fetid atmosphere and poised himself. One plunge would decide it all. A minute or two, and then—

He took the plunge. Head submerged beneath the sullen, enveloping water, he scrambled forward. Advancement for the first few feet was easier now, for the water served as lubrication and he found that the cement walls no longer retarded him with their roughness. He was half-crawling, half-swimming.

And then his heart began to pound a protest at being denied its oxygen. His lungs were bursting, their tissues ruptured by the strain of impounding still the breath that no longer served its revivifying purpose. The drums of death were beating demoniacally in his ears.

A devastating temptation to give up, to open his mouth to the obliterating inrush of water, to seek oblivion in the darkness before his staring, unseeing eyes, overwhelmed him. He relaxed his muscles and abandoned himself to the sweetness of an end without struggle.

And then he was being buoyed up, carried through the swirling waters without volition on his part. He waited, puzzled, for the shock of striking against the top of the drain, but the impact did not come. The blackness had a lesser depth of hue. Then his head broke above the surface of the water, and he found himself gasping, enjoying each piercing agony of fresh inhalation.

Before him, three-fourths submerged, was the mouth of the tunnel through which he had come. The dim under-light of a clouded sky was reflected in the surface of the river. Beside him was Murphy, treading water and waiting.

"Thought yuh was gone, kid," Murphy whispered when Arthur had regained his sense. "C'mon, le's go!"

Moving slowly, cautiously, fearing that any sound of splashing would be observed, Murphy led the way and started to swim along the wall. Arthur responded eagerly. His arms and legs found leverage against the water. He was filled with a glow of conquest. The physical exertion brought balm to cramped and tortured tendons. The wavelets of the stream, slapping softly against his face, exhilarated him. He rested himself for a moment, floating buoyantly. Then he followed in Murphy's wake, swimming lustily, exultingly, toward liberty and life.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**B**UT I can't let you go yet! It's such a marvelous night, and you're so glorious—”

Tom Stevens placed his hand lightly over Lorraine's, to check her as she started to move from the car and go into her home.

“It's late, dear, and I have a busy day ahead. There are a thousand details concerning the ball tomorrow night that are still unfinished.”

“Just a few moments—please?” Tom coaxed.

Lorraine relaxed, acquiescing. As she sank back into the seat of the roadster, Tom switched off the lights. Immediately the moon's illumination seemed to flood them with its soft, enchanting radiance. The miniature pines that lined the driveway were silvery-green sentinels surrounding them.

For a moment they were silent. Lorraine played with the fringe on her flimsy scarf, absorbed in her thoughts. Tom was saturating himself with the luxury of the precious reality of their romance.

Lorraine sighed lightly. A little tremor ran over her. Anxiously he placed her scarf closer around her shoulders.

“You're cold, and I'm keeping you out in the air,” he accused himself.

“No, truly,” she assured him. “Probably just a bit tired.”

She roused herself from her abstraction and smiled brightly. Eager to make the most of the

fleeting interlude, Tom warmed gratefully to the smile. He snuggled her in his arms.

"You see," he explained, "I *couldn't* let you go without telling you some news that I've been saving. Can you guess?"

Lorraine shook her head.

"Good news?" she asked.

"Best ever!" Tom replied.

Still immersed in her own universe of whirling thoughts, she waited to hear, watching the silken fringe as it flowed idly across her fingers.

"It's what I was hoping for, even before we became engaged," Tom told her. He was enthusiastic now. "There's been a shake-up at the office—politics and stuff—"

He paused to gather the full force of the dramatic climax of his announcement, and continued:

"So the District Attorney has made me his chief deputy!"

His news fell flat. Lorraine really had been trying to listen, at least with part of her consciousness, but she was wrestling with a dilemma that demanded all her wits.

Ever since she had learned, the day before, of all that Smooth Sullivan had told her, she had been anxious to share with Tom her own glorious information that her brother was alive. Her first instinct had been to run to the man she loved and live again the dizzy thrill of her knowledge by telling him all about Arthur and his apparent resurrection from the grave, his whereabouts, even if this was in an eastern prison, and even the fact of Arthur's parenthood.

But like a thwarting bondage, there had been always uppermost in her mind the prohibition Smooth had issued: "Be sure and don't spill the beans!" She had come to realize the necessity of keeping this chapter in Arthur's life a secret.

In consequence, her heart was heavy at having to shut off a corner of her thought from this man to whom already she had given all her soul and love. She felt that by not confiding in him, she was being forced to raise an intangible barrier between their hearts.

And as she dwelt upon this mental obstacle, her absent, distract manner made itself sharply noticeable to Tom.

He had been saving his good news until it could be told with greatest effect. With boyish enthusiasm, he had pictured how she would glow with pride in him, how her warm congratulations would lift his soaring spirits still higher, how he would have the opportunity to remind her that it was her inspiration which had won this stepping-stone to fame for him.

Instead of all these, it was as if he had spoken about the weather. All his fine castles had come tumbling. He felt sunk, crestfallen.

"I thought you'd be pleased," he apologized, hurt.

The small-boy tone in his voice penetrated to Lorraine more sharply than his previous words, and instantly, contrite, she spurred herself to response.

"But I *am* pleased," she asserted vigorously. "It's wonderful luck, though I'm sure you deserve it. Forgive me, dearest; I was just thinking—"

She caught herself in time. It wouldn't do to devote words to describe her thoughts. She twitched her trend of mind hastily, and dissembled:

"I was just thinking what an opportunity it is for you."

Her chance resourcefulness was a happy one. Instantly Tom was all intent again upon his affairs, and what they meant to his practice of his profession. Ambition welled within him, and he could feel that the former feeling of expansion was returning rapidly.

"I can make a great record as a prosecutor," he told her. "There's a splendid chance to make a name for myself, and prosecutions, and convictions, bring publicity. Why, it's a stepping stone—"

His imagination leaped over the years to conjure before her the heights to which he might win as the fearless Nemesis of evil-doers. And as his tongue grew eloquent with the buoyancy of his ambitious dreams, he began sketching vividly the successive processes by which he planned to become a notable.

How could he know that of all his phrases, Lorraine heard clearly only the one word: "*PROSECUTOR?*" It had an ominous, a fateful sound of doom. How could he know that in her eyes were not his visions, but those of her own, in which her brother was the solitary unit? How know that in her distorted sympathy, she was picturing Arthur as a diminutive, persecuted soul, seated listless, inert and lonely in a dank and gloomy cell whose walls and bars loomed gigantically around him, crushing, oppressing with their fantastic curves and bulging

sides? How was he to know that her unhappy fancy invested Arthur with a heavy ball and chain, or that, ankle-bound, this portrait of her brother stood for all that gave her unreasoning, instinctive hatred, transcending even her love for Tom, of that law and its machinations that had brought Arthur to such a pass?

"I'll hew to the line, dear," he was telling her. "There is only one secret to success in the D. A.'s office—and that's to be blind to everything but duty. If I stick to that, I'm bound to win!"

He paused and waited for her to answer. The cessation of the cadences of his voice aroused her from her nightmare. A lingering echo of the exultation in his voice came to her aid, and she grasped quickly for a safe response.

"Of course, dear," she replied. "Of course you're right."

"What a help you'll be to me," Tom said. Already subconsciously he had thrown off the drab colors of the supplicant suitor, and was wearing the gay attire of the masterful, triumphant male who was relying but just a little upon an occasional admiring boost from his feminine entourage.

"But now I *must* run to bed," Lorraine protested. "And—I'm so glad for your good fortune."

He smothered her in his arms for a space that seemed to him all too short. Then he released her and she sprang up the steps toward the front door of the Trevelyan home. As she reached the terrace level she paused.

"Good-night, dear man," she called. "Don't for-

get tomorrow night, and be sure to come early for me."

She tossed a farewell kiss and watched as Tom speeded his roadster down the driveway. Then, as if removing a cloak that had grown too heavy, she dropped her guise of gayety. It was with a perplexed and straining heart that she closed the door behind her.

The Santa Fe freight rumbled along the base of the cliff beside the river, clattered over the switch-frogs at the throat of the yard, and came to a stop, with jerks and whistling of airbrakes, in the drab, dusty heart of the industrial section of Los Angeles.

Almost before the wheels ceased turning, two figures, only slightly less begrimed and dusty than the yard, descended from their perch on the girders of a crushed-rock gondola, and fled from the possible approach of a railroad special policeman. They scurried, panting and thirsty, along the side of the freight train, until they came to a road crossing near the neck of the yard. There they dodged up the street, and around a corner, where they paused for breath.

"*Some travellin'*," commented Three-Finger Murphy. "I thought sure I'd croak while the rattler was goin' through the desert!"

Arthur licked at his lips. A coat of alkali dust, mixed with soot from the crude oil burner of the locomotive, made them parched and burning.

"God! To think that I'm really here!"

Murphy grinned derisively at his companion.

"Yeh," he scoffed. "Here yuh are, all right! Chasin' across the country! Gotta yen to see some skirt?"

Arthur shuddered inwardly at this comparison of his Odyssey. As in dream-flashes he recalled their first furtive movements from the prison and their frightened efforts to obtain civilian clothing, ending with the purloining of their nondescript attire from a farmer's back yard. Their arduous progress from New York across the continent, the incessant watch against observation, the roundabout delays occasioned by the wisdom of avoiding cities, the chilling waits at junction water towers in the early mornings, the bodily risks they had taken in boarding moving trains, all passed in his memory like a hazy delirium.

He cursed in retrospect as he remembered once, when a brakeman, suspecting that hoboes were riding the brake beams, had lowered from the forward end of the car a coupling-pin attached to a rope. Arthur's mind flinched in visualizing how the coupling-pin, as if alive with a demon, had bounded up and down, beating against the floor of the car like a flail, as it received each fresh impetus on striking the ties of the road-bed. He and Murphy had clung to their rods in a paralysis of fear, not daring to move from their precarious position above the flying rails, yet aware that at each moment the coupling-pin might swirl upon them with deadly momentum. Only the breaking of the rope had saved them from that peril.

"This is my home, Murphy," said Arthur simply, in explanation to his companion's question. "That's why I came. I just wanted to be—well, to be near some people I know here."

Murphy surveyed Arthur's travel-worn, road-gritted costume. He laughed harshly.

"You look swell to be goin' callin', don't yuh? Like to have 'em see yuh lookin' like a bum, wouldn't yuh?"

The hot retort lingered on Arthur's lips that those whom he knew would welcome him no matter how he appeared. The image of Lorraine was so firmly fixed in his mind that it drew him toward her. He checked himself in time, realizing that it would never do to have Murphy gain a glimmering of Arthur's connection with the Trevelyan home. Ugly hints of blackmail had been heard in the surreptitious chatter of his former prison colleagues.

Murphy noted his companion's hesitation and was quick to profit by it.

"Here's the lay," he announced. "We'll pull a stick-up—glom some bird's poke—and get a stake, see? That'll give yuh the price of some glad rags, an' then yuh'll be ready to see your moll. Whadda yuh say?"

Arthur did not know what to say. He had come out of prison determined to let not the slightest appearance of evil-doing attach itself to him; yet here, at the outset, pressure was being brought to bear on him to swing him into the channels of the underworld. He had heard it often discussed that once a jailbird, always a crook. Was that—must that—

hold good in his case? Not if he could help it, he vowed silently.

But he must dissemble with his companion. Already Murphy was threatening to fasten himself, leech-like, upon him. He feared the consequences of an open rupture. There had been too much talk of an enduring association founded upon the ordeal of their escape.

"You got the looks, kid, and the style," Murphy once had told him while they were rolling, atop of a box-car, across the flat sweeps of the Middle West. "I know the rópes, all of 'em. We'll stick together, an' clean up."

Now, he knew, Murphy already was planning a series of operations in this lucrative field, and counted upon Arthur's active assistance and co-operation.

"I guess you're right," Arthur appeared to yield. "Only, I've got to get my bearings first—get accustomed to moving around without looking backward all the time to see if a cop's after me. Look here! What about that joint you were telling me about?"

He referred to a pool-hall near First and San Pedro streets—a rendezvous for dips, yeggs, second-story men, bindle peddlers, and a headquarters for a fairly high-class mob with which Murphy hoped to make connection.

"What about it?" Murphy repeated.

"I was thinking," Arthur replied, "that I could meet you there tomorrow noon."

Murphy pretended to ponder the suggestion. He knew that if he once let Arthur get away from him,

the separation would be a permanent one. At length he nodded.

"Fair enough," he consented. "That's the place, then."

Arthur hastily shook Murphy's hand, anxious to be away. He swung on his heel and strode down the pavement. Murphy, motionless, watched after him. When Arthur's figure disappeared around a nearby corner, Murphy started to move rapidly. He was almost running until he reached the corner. There he checked himself and glanced cautiously around the jutting building. Arthur was a half-hundred yards beyond. Smiling grimly to himself, Murphy began to saunter after the other. He governed his pace to meet that of Arthur, and was careful not to be noticed in the act of trailing him. Purposefully, deliberately, he followed Arthur on his way, a haunting shadow, portentious, foreboding.

## CHAPTER XIX

ONCE a year in the name of Charity, there foregathered in the armory of a favorite National Guard company, those to whom the society editors of Los Angeles newspapers would refer the next morning as “the ultra-fashionable leaders of the *haute monde* of the Southland.” There were the families of the oil millionaires, the real estate financiers, the land and railroad dynasties, the “artistic” motion picture producers who had submerged their origins in the retail clothing trade, and the nondescript who made up the fringe of the fabric. Lending savor to the ensemble were the representatives, some impoverished, some rolling in wealth as a result of the city’s growth, of those families of Latin names whose forebears had antedated the American invasion of the southwestern empire.

It was one of the latter who approached Lorraine as the girl, accompanied by Tom Stevens, entered the drill-floor that served as a ballroom. The woman was a symphony in ivory. An ivory mask of a face was crowned by tresses that were massed high, in their cream-like glory, upon her head. An old-fashioned ivory back-comb, relic of who can tell what caballero’s antique fancy, surmounted the structure. A stiff brocade gown, resurrected from some antiquated trunk expressly for the occasion, bolstered her shrunken frame. She was a walking mausoleum of the splendors of the Dons.

"You have done well, my dear," said the woman in congratulation. "Thank God that the poor we have always with us. Without them, how could we show ourselves to such splendid advantage?"

Tom Stevens sensed the bitter raillery in the dowager's voice. He stood a little apart. As he glanced at the two, he was struck by the glorious contrast between Lorraine's sheer youthful beauty, and the woman's pitiful efforts to cling to memories of her own duenna-guarded days of romance. He was anxious to take Lorraine away from the old person's suggestion of walking mortality.

"It does seem like a lot of effort for the results we gain," Lorraine responded. "How much simpler things were done in your days, Mrs. Figueroa."

"Each to his own time," the relic replied. "We did a little—on a small scale. You Americans build lavishly, spend lavishly, do great good lavishly and carelessly. Who is to judge? But I think—you lose a little—what shall I say?—grace of living in the doing."

"I think you are right," Lorraine was agreeing. "Sometimes I wonder—"

"Fortunes told! Let us read your future!"

From one of the booths that lined the walls of the drill-room came the strident call of an amateur "ballyhoo" for a seeress at \$5 a see. Tom seized upon the excuse.

"We *must* learn your fortune," he told Lorraine.

Mrs. Figueroa's eyes commanded him. He bowed ceremoniously and asked:

"Will you excuse us?"

"By all means," she agreed. "It is the future

only that interests you, quite properly. Your past is all before you."

She moved away in stately fashion.

"She makes me shiver," Tom commented. "She's like a ghost."

"A charming ghost," Lorraine corrected. "She's right. Our past *is* all before us. Let's learn what it is to be."

As they moved toward the fortune-teller's booth an elderly figure a few paces away caught sight of them and started toward them. An impudent fragment of femininity, garbed fancifully for the event, grasped him by the lapel, and Mark Trevelyan found himself being inveigled into buying a "chance," at an exorbitant price, on a raffle of kewpie dolls. When he had escaped from the transaction, Lorraine and Tom had passed beyond the draped curtain and into the tent of the clairvoyant.

Seated before them, surrounded with the familiar apparatus of the soothsayer, the sweethearts found one of the celebrities of the literary world who, lured by the lucre offered for the "picturization" of her cayenne-sprinkled novels, was sojourning in Los Angeles, and who now, always eager for the lime-light, had essayed the role of palmist and mystic.

A green lantern shed its biliary rays over the oriental hangings of the tent and played upon the jade ornaments with which the author-seeress was capitalizing her green eyes and mahogany hair. Her hands, decked with jade-set rings upon the fore-fingers, caressed the crystal gazing-ball that rested upon the table before her.

"I am a Priestess of Love," she announced, when Lorraine had seated herself at the opposite side of the table and Tom had taken a position, standing, at Lorraine's side. "It is Love that makes the world go 'round."

She was unconscious of plagiarizing the phrase.

Lorraine, amused at the theatrical setting, stole a twinkling exchange of glances with Tom.

"Love is everything," Madame the seeress continued, not unmindful of the effect she was making. She gestured toward the crystal globe.

"Think! Look into the crystal's depths, and think! Think of Love!"

Intent only upon the fun, Lorraine did as she was told. It was a lark, she reminded herself, in a spirit of foolery.

Her eyes focused themselves upon the curves of the crystal sphere, and she stared intently. Her mind, automatically shut off from consciousness of the present, reverted to its perplexing worries. She found herself dwelling upon Arthur, and what Smooth Sullivan had told her of him.

She was recalled to the moment by the drone of Madame's voice.

"There is a tall young man," the clairvoyant was saying, "who means much in your life. He is near you—either in thought or person."

The obvious significance of the reference to Tom awakened Lorraine from her introspective dreams. She could not withhold a glance over her shoulder, and Tom, standing by, was filled with a glow of ardent affection by her smile of meaning.

This fortune-telling thing was fun, Lorraine decided, even if it were the most apparent nonsense. She glanced toward the seeress, with an evanescent smile of friendliness.

“But look!” commanded the seeress. “Look into the crystal ball!”

The pigeons that thronged the public square in the heart of the city had long since found resting-place in the trees of the park when Arthur Trevelyan, who had been wandering aimlessly all through the long afternoon, paused at a bench by the side of a fountain and sank upon it. His hand dropped upon a newspaper tossed away by a careless lounger. Idly he picked it up and in the light of an overhead arc, glanced over its pages.

A face stared up at him from the welter of type. It was that of his sister, embellished with the crude scrolls of the paper’s “art” department, and captioned with her name and the phrase: “Aids Orphans.”

Beside it, when his eager eye leaped for an explanation of the publishing of the picture, he saw an adjective-laden account of the annual ball given by society leaders as a means of raising charity funds for the amelioration of the condition of the poor. The particular editor in charge of the edition had “played up” the story because of the opportunity it had given him to print a pretty face, but of this Arthur of course had no inkling. To him the news

transcended anything of world events that any press could print.

In a paragraph preceded by the sub-heading, "Patroness Active," he saw that for which he was seeking. His sister's name led a subdivision of those names which editors so love, from circulation points of view, to print. She was credited with being chairman of the committee on arrangements. What this might mean Arthur had no idea; but the significant fact was there: Lorraine actually was prominent in the event being given publicity, and the ball actually was in progress as he sat reading this paper.

This was enough. Perhaps he might catch a glimpse of her. Perhaps he might even steal a word or two, if fortune helped him. He knew the grounds of the armory. It might be his luck to get in touch with her without being noticed by others.

He rose impulsively from the bench. Transportation was a minor item. He knew that he could walk to the armory before his sister would be leaving. He swung into a rapid pace and at the entrance of the park, turned southward.

Following him, sure that surveillance would develop something of material interest, lurked Murphy.

"You will be happy in your love. I view an altar—a bridal veil. But wait!"

The exclamation, breaking in upon the professional patter, roused Lorraine to sharper attention. Madame was a good actress, if nothing more.

The clairvoyant leaned over the crystal and gazed into its depths. Her voice came taut and strained. Her hands moved tensely, dramatizing her words.

"I see trouble—and an unexpected visitor—"

Involuntarily Lorraine moved forward. Tom's hand rested itself lightly upon her shoulder. A reassuring pressure conveyed to her his disbelief in such obvious "hokum" of the love-tale teller's art. She glanced upward at him and telegraphed, as only lovers can, her accord with his scoffing attitude at all this claptrap.

"I see someone come—as from a grave—" went on Madame the seeress. She was well into the spirit now, and was drawing upon her imaginative resources.

In spite of herself Lorraine caught her breath. Could this woman—was it possible—know anything of her family's history and be playing upon it? No, that would be too cruel!

"I see him come," Madame predicted. "I see a death—perhaps a living death. It may be his spirit hovers nigh!"

This was too much! Lorraine rose sharply, shoving back her chair so abruptly that it upset. She struggled to regain her composure.

"Really—I shouldn't have done this—I don't believe in it—but I thank you very much!"

Tom half led her from the tent. After them the novelist watched narrowly, with growing enthusiasm at the success of her unplanned maneuver.

"What a situation that would make," she told herself. "I'll use it. It builds—it builds! And will fit in anywhere!"



AFTER THE BALL

A RENCO PRODUCTION

"I see trouble—and an unexpected visitor—" the seeress told.



Hurriedly, forgetting her role as soothsayer, she reached for her bag and found the miniature tablet that she always kept at hand. Her fingers raced as she scribbled the fundamentals of the scene she had created.

Outside the tent, free from the cloying incense of burning sandalwood, Lorraine found her breath and her self-control.

"Such silliness," she exclaimed. "But that woman made me nervous. There was something about her—and the things she said!"

"Just the usual line," Tom encouraged her. "She has a good memory, and remembers what real fortune-tellers have sprung on her, that's all."

"But that talk about trouble!"

"What trouble can there be?" Tom argued. "They always tell you that to make you think you're getting your money's worth."

"I suppose so," Lorraine consented. "But she seemed so in earnest."

"Of course she was in earnest. Why wouldn't she be? That's what she's there for. Besides—" here the advocate at the bar abandoned his logic and became again the wooer—"besides, didn't she say you would be happy in your love?"

"That's so." Lorraine found refuge in the phrase. "Part of what she said surely will come true."

"That part will, if I have anything to do with it," Tom vowed. "There's the music—and we haven't had a dance tonight!"

She turned happily toward him and started to place her hand in his. Then—

"Oh, Miss Trevelyan!"

It was a member of the executive committee who was speaking. She approached with a sense of her importance, and flourished, half chidingly, a paper folded in her hand.

"So sorry to interrupt—but I know you'll want to check this list of music and supplies while the men are here." She nodded to Tom. "I'm sure you're angry with me for taking her away," she apologized.

"Business before pleasure," Tom returned, trying to make the best of his reversal.

"Business—then pleasure," Lorraine amended, with an emphasis that made Tom forget his disgruntled emotions at the interruption.

He watched after Lorraine as she departed in tow of the officious member of the committee. Curious, he thought, that she should have been upset by the fortune-teller. Still, you never could tell about a woman, or what would throw her off her poise. And Lorraine had so much of that quality, too. No wonder he was head over heels in love with her. He was telling himself how lucky he was.

Outside the armory, in the semi-obscurity of the grounds that ran beside a sunken garden, ambled a shuffling, hesitating figure. Arthur knew well enough that he would not dare approach the ballroom and seek boldly for his sister. Let alone the fact that he could not risk disclosure of his identity, his attire precluded entrance into that scene of gayety and glitter that he glimpsed through the long

French windows. Still, if only he might even see Lorraine just once, he would be repaid. Tomorrow might come the meeting for which he had planned so many times.

He moved from the shadow of a conifer and darted across the lawn. Abruptly he halted in the refuge of another clump of shrubbery, from which he gained a commanding view of the armory drill-room and its occupants. Once he thought he saw Lorraine passing momentarily in the throng, but he could not be sure.

From the vantage point which Arthur had deserted a little before, Murphy watched, puzzled at the behavior of his quarry.

"It's a queer game he's playin'," Murphy told himself. "But whatever it is, I'm in on it."

## CHAPTER XX

“PENNY for your thoughts?”

Tom Stevens glanced quickly around at the spur of the cooing feminine voice behind him. He had been watching the dancers without seeing them. The rhythm of the orchestra had been pulsing through his mind with the name of Lorraine attuned to it. He turned and saw Gertie Abercrombie, her of the honeyed tongue and the malicious mind, smiling at him.

“You couldn’t buy them for a penny, I’m afraid,” he said.

“Oh, I forgot. How silly of me!” Gertie exclaimed. “I should have known that legal brains come high.”

“I wasn’t thinking of law,” Tom replied cryptically, and Gertie caught his meaning.

“Then I know! One guess?”

Tom nodded.

“Lorraine Trevelyan! Am I right?”

Again Tom nodded.

“No wonder your thoughts are above price! And I’m glad to be able to congratulate you on your good fortune in winning her! Oh, I’ve heard! You’re not the first man who has tried—”

Underlying the flow of fulsome compliment with which he was being deluged, Tom was aware of a feline sharpness. Gertie Abercrombie was a type

with which he had come little in contact, and he was amazed at the satisfaction she derived from spreading pointless venom. Still, he was too happy to be annoyed seriously by the creature. His thoughts began to wander as he answered subconsciously in polite deference to her presence.

The tongue clattered on.

"She's such an *interesting* girl! And with such varied activities! There's her work here, and oh, so many things! Why, just the other day—"

And Gertie launched into an enthusiastic account of seeing Lorraine at the Toreador in company with "the *quaintest* character, like someone out of a book." Tom only half caught the drift of her remarks. That Lorraine, who, as he was indifferently aware, did have acquaintances developed as a result of the fervor with which she threw herself into charities, and improvements, and other diversions, should have met this person of whom Gertie was telling, did not occur to him as worthy of comment. But the subtle emphasis which the Abercrombie woman was placing upon the incident galled. . . .

He was relieved when he saw Lorraine approaching.

"I was telling your fiance what a lucky boy he is," Gertie explained when Lorraine joined them. "And I think you're a lucky girl, too!"

Lorraine acknowledged her good fortune. She was anxious to have a few moments with Tom free from distractions.

"Well," said Gertie, simpering, "there's a crowd!"

Tom sighed with relief as Gertie vanished.

"Poor man!" Lorraine exclaimed, affectionately. "How you must have suffered! At least, I hope you weren't enjoying it. Are you sure—" this in mock concern, "that you don't like her better than you do me?"

Tom fell in with the spirit of her teasing query.

"I don't know," he replied, dubiously. "Somebody might learn to love her. She's rather—well, tonic."

"Oh!" Lorraine failed to note his facetious tone.

"That is," Tom hastily amended, "like a bitter tonic that makes you enjoy wholesome things the more."

"That's nicer," Lorraine agreed.

"Seriously," Tom continued, "I was as lonesome without you as an egg without ham. She talked incessantly—mostly about you. Of course, if what she said had come from anyone else, I'd have been delighted to listen. But such chatter! All about your meeting that man at the Toreador, for instance."

"She told you *that*?"

"Of course. Why not?"

Lorraine had glanced up, startled, when Tom casually mentioned the incident at the hotel. Her sharp intake of breath betrayed her agitation, and a little of her emotion communicated itself to Tom. He could not know that he had touched at a vital spot, but his curiosity was aroused at her apparent dismay.

"It didn't mean anything," Tom continued. "Why shouldn't she have told me?"

"Oh, no reason—no reason at all. Only—why, I was just surprised that she should even have remembered it and thought it worth while repeating."

Beneath her flurried thoughts Lorraine was stirred by one determination: to avoid, if by any possible chance she could do so, lying to Tom about Smooth Sullivan and the word he had brought. It tortured her even to be evasive and dissembling; but the outright falsehood loomed before her as a hideous thing to be dodged at any cost.

Hurriedly she pulled herself together and smiled into his face.

"It doesn't matter," she assured him. "Gertie probably thought she had a little morsel of gossip, that's all."

"Just what you could expect of a girl like that," Tom answered. "Come, let's finish this dance."

But the ease with which she escaped from a perilous situation came too abruptly, and she was unnerved. She passed her hand wearily across her forehead.

"It's the warm air, I think," she explained. "Can't we get away from all this crush just for a little?"

Eagerly Tom seized upon her suggestion. He was only too glad at the prospect of having Lorraine to himself where they would not be interrupted.

"Of course!" he agreed. "There's the terrace outside."

Guiding her through the throng, they made their way to the French windows opening upon the terrace, and stepped upon the paving.

The night air, and the velvet caress of the moon's rays, came in welcome relief to the fevered atmosphere of the ball room, and Lorraine, who had been lifted to a seat upon the balustrade of the terrace, found herself throwing off the blanket of depression that had settled upon her in the fortune-teller's tent. Tom was standing close beside her, openly adoring her beauty and sweetness.

"Dear man!" she murmured, gently. "I do love you."

He looked into her eyes, that had more of the mystery of the night in them than all the universe that spanned, twinkling, overhead. He read a tenderness in their depths which filled him with a swirling, tumultuous affection.

"Really?" he begged. "Truly?"

She smiled softly in confirmation.

"Oh, it's almost too good to be true! I catch myself wondering if I'm not in some wonderful dream. Tell me again!"

"I do." The witchery of the night was shearing off the constricting threads that had been tangled around her heart, and she could feel herself expand.

"Only—if only—" He paused to frame his wish. "If only we two were away from all the world! Would you like it?"

"Yes," she breathed.

"To go away from all this—to have just ourselves! Not on some silly tropical island, or anything like that. I wish I could take you now to the high Sierras—to a mountain-top cabin. . . . Where the air is rarer than wine, and the days go by

like moments, and the nights bring one nearer to the stars—our stars! Would you be happy there?"

"Yes," she breathed again.

"My dearest! It's all too glorious! Why wait, or bother with an elaborate ceremony? We could start at once! Steal away from here before we were missed, throw some clothing together, find some friendly little justice of the peace, and be on the road, driving to meet the dawn!"

"But not tonight! Oh, we couldn't! What would people say?"

"You know you don't care what people would say! Please! Tell me you will!"

She was being swept by the fervor of his entreaties. It would be so good, so comforting, to yield—to allow herself to be carried off her feet—to be with him on their mountain-top. . . .

Abruptly she was marshalling her forces to think clearly. She compelled her eyes to leave his, and gazed, trying to shape her thoughts, into the garden.

"Say that you will!" Tom implored again.

She heard him only faintly. Had he known it, he had no need of words to reinforce his plea. Was what he asked the wise thing? Or what was wisdom, anyway? Or did it matter, so long as they were happy?

She saw a face half masked in the shrubbery beyond, and tossed her head to remove from her mind its intruding spectacle. The sight persisted. She closed her eyes to shut it out, and in the clearer vision of her mind its features compelled her attention. She looked again. This time she was sure—

as sure as one can be who sees a reality and remains convinced that the sight can be only a fantastic mental trick. She stared sharply now. There could be no doubt. She was looking, or under the illusion that she was looking, at the face of her brother, who, her senses told, was three thousand miles away.

The figure, its dark clothing dimly outlined against the darker shrubbery, moved slightly. As quickly as it had come before her, the face vanished. She was staring, wide-eyed, now, and her breath seemed to have been choked within her. Her face was contorted with shocked astonishment.

"Why, what's the matter?"

Tom's question brought her to a semblance of her senses. She could not remove this impression that she had seen Arthur there in the shadows, but she knew, was positive, that this could not be. She shook her head. There was a hysterical note in her involuntary laughter. Her nerves were playing cruel pranks upon her. Again Tom asked the cause of her disturbance.

"I—I think I've worked too hard," she replied. "I've been on the go too much, I'm afraid."

"I know you have, dear," Tom said. "It's what I've been thinking of, and why I've wanted to take you away. Can't I do something for you?"

"It's nothing," Lorraine said. But she needed time to think, to be herself again. "Won't you bring me a glass of water?"

She placed her hand reassuringly upon his. Anxious at her distress, he hesitated to leave her.

"Are you sure you'll be all right?" he asked.

"Quite all right."

As he hurried away Lorraine looked again toward the shrubbery where the apparition had given her such a shock. Now only the outlines of the bush were apparent. It was as she had told Tom—she had been too much on the go. Perhaps he was right. Perhaps she would consent, and go away with him.

“Lorraine—little sister!”

She felt strong arms clasping her tightly, and a face pressed against hers, then hands at her shoulders holding her off at a little distance for inspection. Before her, this time without doubt or chance of illusion, was Arthur—her brother Arthur.

“Oh-h-h!” It was the sigh of a heart overflowing with gladness, rather than an exclamation. Lorraine was in ecstasy. She passed her hands over his face, as if to assure herself that he was here in the flesh. Her throat tightened and she was swallowing to keep down happy tears. She sprang to her feet and threw her arms about him, then yielded to his crushing embrace.

They stood so, tightly clasped. They drew apart a little, and looked at each other wonderingly. Then they were in each other’s arms again.

“It’s you—it’s really you!”

Lorraine was the first to break the silence. They released their arms and stood, hands entwined, for a moment. Then volleys of questions, words, explanations, came from each, with each unheedful of the other’s reply, each incoherently trying to express a part of the happiness of reunion. It was the moment for which they had lived.

"I had to see you," Arthur gasped. "I got away —they're after me—but I had to see you—"

In the sunken garden Murphy shifted from one foot to the other as he tried to master his astonishment at the actions of the man he had been trailing.

"Wot t'ell!" he exclaimed, puzzled.

Brother and sister merged together again in a flood of kisses and little love-touches. Lorraine's hands were fluttering over Arthur. Gone from her temporarily was thought of Tom Stevens, his suggestion of their elopement, or anything but the fact that her brother was here, here! before her.

At last she rallied her thoughts.

"But you're in danger?"

Arthur nodded, then tried to shield his sister from alarm.

"Not much—if I'm careful. I escaped, you see."

"Won't they trace you?"

Arthur shook his head.

"I think not. I'm pretty sure I've eluded them. But I mustn't be seen with you. It might cause comment, and suspicion."

Lorraine remembered that Smooth Sullivan had told her of Arthur's fear that the Trevelyan family would be involved in his prison taint.

"As if I cared!" she said with high contempt. "It wouldn't matter *what* was said of us, so long as you are free!"

"It would do no good, dear," Arthur persuaded. "I must meet you secretly for a while."

She realized the truth in what he said.

"Go now, then," she told him. "Quickly, before





AFTER THE BALL

A RENCO PRODUCTION

There came the rasp of a chair being shoved across the  
paving. A heavy tread sounded nearby.

you're seen. But come to me at home. We'll find a way."

She kissed him again, this time in haste lest what he feared would come to pass. Her touch upon his arm half thrust him away. For a few feet he moved reluctantly toward the garden. Then the sway of their re-union overpowered him and he turned, strode quickly back to her, and folded her again in his arms. It was tenderly, beautifully done; the high, clear unsullied passion of brother-and-sister love.

There came the rasp of a chair being shoved across the paving. A heavy tread sounded nearby. A glass crashed upon the stone as it dropped from Tom Stevens' hand.

"So this," he remarked bitterly, "is why you sent me away!"

## CHAPTER XXI

THE tinkle of the shattering goblet as it fell from Stevens' nerveless fingers, reverberated through Lorraine's swimming senses and brought cruel realization of the perilous situation in which she was placed. With Arthur's last kiss still tingling on her lips, she could only turn a stunned face to her fiance as he strode indignantly toward her. She could see vaguely that his features were livid with quick rage and rising temper.

"Go! Go!" she whispered to Arthur.

Trevelyan, impelled by his sister's thrust, sprang over the balustrade. As he landed, catlike, on the turf below, he swung around for a fleeting glance backward. His sister's back was turned toward the man who had interrupted their meeting; he did not recognize in the newcomer's countenance any sign of acquaintance. As he ran toward the sheltering shrubbery his mind was turning over in wonder at the identity of this man who could speak to Lorraine in terms of possession. Then he reached the shadows and hurried lightly to the street.

Following him, still the stalker of prey, was Murphy.

Lorraine stared fascinated into Tom's accusing eyes. Some faintly stirring portion of her thoughts struggled through the blanket of numbed shock to suggest to her that this man before her was a

stranger—that the Tom Stevens she had known was gone.

It was true. The contorted face, the attitude of the figure in its repelling stiffness, the tone of indictment in the harshness of Tom's question, all were alien. She shook her head in anticipatory negation of his next words.

"Who is he?" Tom demanded. "What is he to you?"

If her emotions before were harrowed, now she was being placed upon the rack. The gyves that muted her tongue were tortures almost unendurable. The crushing knowledge that she could not tell, that she must remain silent regarding Arthur's identity, overwhelmed her. She knew what her silence must indicate to Tom, yet she could not free herself by proving the innocence of Arthur's kiss. A labyrinth of explanations which must inevitably lead to Arthur's undoing stretched before her; and she could only continue to remain quiet.

Her very anxiety to remove suspicion from Tom's mind, her obvious agitation in her dilemma, shouted aloud her guilt. She was aware of this, and automatically became more flustered. It is only the practiced deceiver who maintains an air of ease.

"Who was that man?" Tom repeated.

"He's nobody—that is—"

"Nobody!"

"Nobody that matters, I mean."

"What! When I've just seen him holding you in his arms?"

"Well, I—I—"

Tom's temper was changing from that of white-

hot iron to the deceptive leaden hue that masks the heat in the metal. He was growing conscious of the violation of his rights. He felt himself outraged.

“You kissed him!” he charged.

“There wasn’t anything wrong—please!” she begged.

“Then why did he run away?”

Why, indeed? How could she answer? She glanced toward the direction in which Arthur had disappeared, as if to summon aid from him. She was in an impasse. Her eyes were pleading for mercy, for an end to the inquisition, but Tom was hard, determined now, and did not notice the tears glistening on the lashes that fringed her eyes.

“Why did he run away if there was nothing wrong?”

“He had to!—oh, I can’t tell you! Please don’t ask!”

“Not ask! And let it go without a word?”

She nodded.

“But that’s ridiculous! Why can’t you tell me?”

“I—can’t—”

“But why?”

“Because—”

“That’s not a reason. Tell me!”

“No. I can’t!”

A repeated demand was poised on Tom’s lips. He repressed it. He regarded her grimly. As with her a little while before, so now she seemed to him to be a stranger, so quickly can one’s point of view to another change. He hesitated—was about to yield for the moment. Then a devil whispered in his ear

and the words of Gertie Abercrombie came back to him—double-pronged forks of venom putting barbs on the innuendos Gertie had strewn with her treacle sweetness.

His expression changed. Before he had been the indignant suitor, the lover whose armor of dignity had been pierced; now he was the jealous male ready to find a rival in any masculine form.

His eyes narrowed. He knew that what he was about to say was unworthy, but relished the shame of their significance.

"Then it is true—what Gertie Abercrombie hinted! Your *friend* at the Toreador—no wonder you were upset at being seen with him!"

"Oh! Oh, no! Not that!"

Lorraine recoiled with revulsion at the construction he was placing on the Sullivan episode. The blood leaped to her face. It was as if she were being exposed, ungarmented.

"How can you say that? Oh! It isn't true! It isn't! Not that, anyway!"

"What else do you want me to think?"

"Anything but that! Tom, how *could* you? You say you love me! And then suggest—oh, it's horrible! It isn't true! Please believe me!"

The genuineness of her tone broke down a little of Tom Stevens' sureness. He was eager to find any foundation for a belief that she was not perfidious.

"I *want* to believe you!" he begged. "I *want* to think you love me too much to—to—well, to do that! But how can I?"

"You can! You must! Tom! You must believe me!"

"Then *why* won't you tell me?"

A merry-go-round of questions, getting nowhere. She shook her head again.

"If you'll only give me some explanation! Anything—anything at all to make me feel sure!"

Poor egotistic male, seeking to buttress his self-esteem by a few words from the same person in whom, in herself, he could not place implicit faith.

"If there's nothing wrong about it, as you say, *why* can't you tell me?"

Why? Why? His incessant "why"! How could she meet it?

"I can't, Tom, I tell you! I simply can't! At least, now! Please wait until I can! Later, Tom!"

"Later? Not now? You wish me to wait, with this thing torturing me?"

"Oh, please, please—yes!"

Her plea for time was misconstrued. It seemed evident that she sought only for an interval in which to concoct some plausible explanation of the kiss. Meanwhile, he could go around being tortured! Like all men, he began to feel a flood of self-pity welling up within him.

It was too much! She was asking the impossible! Ask any man—she was being unfair.

His own nerves were being put through exceptional stress, and he too broke under the emotional storm.

"It's hopeless!" he declared. "It's no use! You must think I—I—why, you must think I'm a jellyfish, and not a man! Here you were, letting an-

other man kiss you, and hold you, and kissing him, and you ask me to wait! I'm a fool even to discuss it with you! You say you can't tell me—”

“Not now, Tom!” she interrupted.

“You can't, because you know there isn't anything for you to say!”

“You're unjust—”

“‘Unjust’! Then what are you? Are you being fair? Asking me to wait! *Why* can't you tell me, if you haven't anything to hide?”

The same unanswerable query! That was just it—that she did have something to hide, even if in the hiding she brought down upon herself all the stigma which his questions indicated.

Her head dropped with fatigue. Better his belief that his suspicions were justified, than a continuation of this ordeal! There had been too much strain.

Tom paused for breath. The brief interlude brought courage to her. She looked him in the face, and sadly, wearily, she faced the issue. She asked:

“You won't trust me?”

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

“How can I? It's so obvious. I find you in the act—and you won't explain. What *could* you explain?”

She caught her breath. There was a giddy emotion as of rushing madly toward the brink of a precipice. Soon the crash must come. The galloping words swirled her onward.

“You *won't* have faith in me? You mean that?”

Again the shrug.

The precipice. The brink. The galloping feet, carrying her onward—over—

The instinct of self-preservation. The last despairing effort to thwart her own involuntary processes sweeping her to destruction.

“You still demand that I tell? You won’t—take my word?”

His steady gaze—implacable, dour, relentless. The dreadful finality of it all.

Through the windows the sound of the orchestra. The languorous rhythm of a waltz. “Auf Wiedersehen.” The irony of coincidence.

She looked at him a moment; this man who so short a time before was so close and dear to her—now, still dear, but so foreign and strange. Her eyes dropped. A stabbing glint, coldly crystalline as the moon’s rays which it reflected, came from the diamond which had signified their engagement.

Now it was a mockery. Disillusion shimmered in the brilliancy of the gem. If he could not love her enough to believe in her on fiat—why, he could not really love her at all. So she reasoned. She did not know that love is a thing not circumscribed by logic.

Her fingers tendril-like entwined around the platinum band. Slowly, painfully, as if the flesh were reluctant to release the symbol, she drew the ring from her finger. Her face was turned away as she handed it gropingly toward Tom.

“My dear! My dear!”

His imploring words brought no response. Her outstretched hand was stiff, unflexed with determination.

"Lorraine! Honey girl! Don't let's do this! Tell me all about it."

She shook her head with a purposeful, sinking knowledge of conclusion.

"Won't you give in, dear? I would—I would gladly—but I can't."

Blindly her hand motioned, holding out the ring.

He stared dully at the gleaming stone. His hand semi-consciously wrapped around it. He weighed it, tossing it in his palm, as if appraising its significance, then dropped it carelessly into a pocket.

Lorraine's head drooped forward. All she wanted now was that he go—go before her anguish tore her past toleration.

He regarded her sharply. In her attitude he could only see determination, hardness. It seemed that she had welcomed this denouement, in order that she might be able to meet, unrestricted by other obligation, this man whom he had seen running through the garden.

His body stiffened. Very well, came the thought. If *that* were what she wished, she should have it! He grew sullen with the bitter soreness of his heart. Stiffly he bowed his head in acquiescence, then turned on his heel. . . .

A few feet away the veneer of polish asserted itself. He was punctilious in the intonation of his words as he asked:

"May I take you home?"

"No—no, thanks," she replied dispiritedly. "I'll call father."

"Very well," he replied, formally. So this was an end to it. He stalked away, his body muscles rigid. He did not look backward, though if he had, Lorraine would not have seen. She was sitting, a stricken, broken-hearted person, with her face buried in her hands and her eyes burning for the relief of tears that now strangely would not come.

## CHAPTER XXII

WHEN events “happen” in such wise that they startle us by their unexpected bearing upon the moment, some call them remarkable coincidences. Others, perhaps with more insight, ascribe them to the workings of an inscrutable Fate . . . .

There was a strand, apparently with loose end neglected in the pattern of the cloth, which the Weaver at the Loom had been reserving until its time should come. The thread, a brilliant fibre against its duller background, was being used again. It wandered in the meshes of the tapestry; and back and forth, upward—upward again—and down, the Weaver’s fingers passed. The picture grew. The inchoate figures took on form. . . . .

Which is to say that Tom Stevens glanced upward, roused from his abstraction, as he heard a rapping at his office door. Hastily he thrust into an open desk drawer a photograph of Lorraine. He closed the drawer and swung in his chair toward the door.

An attendant, in the uniform of a state employe of the District Attorney’s office, stood in the aperture.

“There’s a lady to see you, sir,” the attendant said.

Tom nodded his willingness to be seen. The attendant stepped from sight. Suddenly Tom’s pulses

pounded with the thought that possibly—miracle of miracles!—Lorraine might have come to the mountain, since the mountain could not come to her. His fists clenched the arms of his chair and he waited, tense.

He heard the knob of the door rattle and the attache say: "Step in, Miss."

Steeling himself to a casual motion, Tom turned his chair to face the door. He raised his eyes from the trial transcript which he had picked up to control his trembling hands, and forced himself to look toward his visitor. There was nothing in his face to show his hope that he might see Lorraine framed in the doorway.

Instead, a young woman whom he had not seen before looked at him in inquiry. Absently he noted the prettiness of her face, the aureole of light that was caught in her fair hair, the hint of tragedy in her attractive eyes. By her side, holding her hand in frightened uncertainty, was a young child; a little girl of four or five, whose face epitomized the blonde prettiness of the woman who so evidently was her mother.

"The District Attorney?" the visitor asked.

"Chief Deputy," Tom replied. "Won't you be seated?"

The young woman found a chair beside Tom's desk and placed herself, with an arm around the youngster, who gazed with round-eyed gravity at Tom. He glanced at the mother, then at the little girl, confirmed his opinion of their relationship, then back at the mother.

"What can I do for you?" came his words at length.

"The Social Service Bureau sent me—I'm a stenographer—I was told you needed one."

"Yes—I need a secretary." Tom was recalled rudely from his ephemeral dreams to the practicalities of the moment. "I asked for a young woman who must be expert in her work, but more than that, one who knows how to keep confidences, and use discretion. Do you think you can meet those requirements?"

"I have learned to be discreet—and I am keeping confidences," the applicant responded. "And—I need a position badly."

"You are married?" The question was pointed by Tom's glance at the youngster.

"Yes—this is my daughter, Eve."

"And your husband?"

"He is dead."

There was a catch in her voice as she spoke which belied the matter-of-factness with which the job-seeker tried to answer. But bravely she continued:

"There are just ourselves—that is why I need the work, you see."

Tom found himself being impelled to sympathy for the applicant—an emotion which he could not detach from his effort to being abstractly business-like.

"Yes, I see—did you tell me your name?"

"It is Gay—Mrs. Gilda Gay."

Beneath the obvious theatricality of the alliteration stirred a hint of fleeting memory that some-

where Tom had heard this name before; but it was only a hint, and he brushed it aside as one of deceptive familiarity because of its trite glitter. After all, he pondered, people sometimes do have names even more absurd than those of the stage. He was trying to assure himself that his prospective secretary would be a satisfactory one, and at the same time to avoid the humiliating catechism that he knew was the accepted formula between employer and work-hunter.

"I should like to consider you for the work—but isn't it rather difficult for you? I mean, how do you expect to manage for your daughter?"

"That's just it—that's why the Social Service people sent me." The response was eager. "They know that I've arranged with a neighbor to take care of my little girl while I'm at work. I could promise that I would be efficient—and not let my difficulties interfere with the work."

The evident necessity that prompted the girl's answers to his questions brought an increasing interest in her application. It might be taking a chance, he thought. Still—he looked toward the little girl, who was continuing to gaze at him with the serious, steadfast candor of childhood. He saw in Eve's face something—a tilt to the nose, an elusive expression around the eyes, that reminded him ridiculously of Lorraine.

"Do you think you would like to have your mother work for me?" he asked her.

Eve nodded gravely.

"If my muvver says so," Eve replied. "My muvver knows best 'bout ev'thing."

"That *is* an endorsement," Tom laughed. Somehow he was feeling a warmth that was throwing off the sense of emptiness he had borne ever since the night of the dance. He smiled encouragingly at Gilda.

"Do you mind a test?" he asked.

"Of course not," she returned. "Do you wish to dictate?"

In answer he reached toward his desk, where a stenographic notebook had been discarded by his former assistant. Methodically he placed the implements of her craft before her, but as she started to take them up, she found her arms occupied with the burden of Eve. For the moment she became confused and made little futile gestures.

Tom noticed.

"Let me," he offered, and held out his hands toward Eve. The baby hesitated and then impulsively came to a decision. She stepped from her mother's side, placed her tiny hands in Tom's, allowed herself to be lifted to his lap, and wriggled into a comfortable position.

Gilda beamed in grateful acknowledgment of his consideration and opened the notebook. She waited, with pencil poised.

"Let me see," Tom began. "This work isn't of ordinary commercial nature, you know. Suppose I read to you from some legal matter—it will be harder, with technical terms, but—"

"I am prepared for those," Gilda responded.

"Then here—"

He glanced at his desk-top, but the plate-glass surface was free of anything that would serve as

guide for dictation. His hand stretched toward a drawer. He pulled it open. Underneath the portrait of Lorraine that he had hidden hurriedly away, he groped for a sheaf of transcript.

A quick intake of breath distracted him and he looked up curiously. Gilda, her gaze riveted upon the photograph, was biting her lips in an involuntary attempt to check an exclamation. When she grew aware that Tom had noticed her surprise at seeing the photograph she blushed. The flood of crimson, marvelously enhancing her beauty, went unnoticed. Tom was wondering at her agitation, and Gilda was realizing that on the verge of obtaining a position, her blunder had betrayed her into an indiscretion that might thwart her.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" she apologized. "I didn't mean to be rude—but it came so suddenly! I used to know her—the girl in the picture."

It was Tom's turn to show surprise.

"You *did*?" he asked. Loverlike, though he had persuaded himself that there was no future for him with Lorraine, he was anxious to find anything on which to pin mention of her.

"Did you know—Miss Trevelyan well?"

The name broke down Gilda's reticence. She could not dissemble, though she was tempted to evade the question by admitting merely a slight acquaintance. It would not do to deceive, she feared; and without inkling of what relationship her prospective employer might bear to the Trevelyan family, she added:

"I was her brother's wife."

"Not really!"

It was too astounding. Tom knew, of course, of the history of Arthur Trevelyan's marriage—his disinheritance, and “death” in the East—but that this girl—Arthur's wife—after a span of years should appear—should come to him, of all persons—was too remarkable almost for credence. Quickly he questioned her, bearing upon the details as he remembered Lorraine had told them; her narration of the essential facts checked minutely with his information.

“It takes my breath away!” he told her. “It's hard to realize, meeting you this way.”

“You knew my husband, then?”

“I never met him,” Tom replied. “But I often have heard his family speak—of him.”

He hesitated. You see, he reminded himself, he hardly could explain how closely he was on terms, or had been, with the Trevelyan family.

“You knew—my husband was dead?”

Tom bowed.

“I met Miss Trevelyan—and her father—after his death. We were in Europe when the word came.”

“In Europe!” Gilda gasped. “Then—his family—the funeral—didn't they help?”

“They helped,—yes,” Tom informed her. “But there had been too much delay in reaching them. He was buried before they returned to America.”

“Then—he was all alone?”

This was all news to Gilda—something of which she had never been able to learn.

“Why, yes. There was no trace of his wife—” The idea struck home to Tom with force. “Look

here! What became of you? I've heard them often wonder. Why, they hunted everywhere for you—and could get no word. Where did you go? Why haven't you gone to them?"

"Go to them? Go to his family! Never!"

Her vehemence came like a sudden shock.

"But why? They searched—they tried to help."

"'Help'! Help! They tried to help too late!" Gilda's words were dyed with bitterness. "The help should have come before he was killed—oh! It was he who needed their help—I want none of it!"

"But—"

"Oh, you don't understand!" she protested. "The boy was not bad—not vicious—just the result of his own father's mistakes. And he was so lovable! And then to have him—you know how he was—how he died?"

Tom nodded.

"The papers lied! I know it! I know he was desperately in need of money—but he wasn't a thief! If his father had helped him then! But no! Instead he was stony, iron-hearted."

"But at least you could have met the family on their return," Tom still insisted.

"I couldn't! I wasn't able to do so, even if I had wished! Why, I nearly died myself!"

"What!"

"I wish I had! At least, I wished so then! Now, it's different, with Eve. But then! I learned of it the morning after he was killed—I started to go to him—and then later—days and days later, I

found myself in a hospital, and they told me what had happened."

Vividly she sketched what she could tell of the automobile accident which had kept her unconscious during the crucial interval. Tom's expression changed again, and once more he was conscious of this deep sympathy for Arthur Trevelyan's wife.

"Why, the poor kid!" he exclaimed to himself. Her voice was gentler now.

"When I left the hospital he had been buried. I went—once—to his grave—the people showed me where it was—I wanted only to get away—from everything—"

"But how did you manage? How did you live?" His words were comfortingly soft and considerate in pitch.

"There was just a little money left—the last he had, and he gave it to me the last time I saw him. My Arthur! Just that, and a few keepsakes—but later—I lost those. And then, after the hospital there was the show business again—I got along, somehow—I guess most people just do get along—somehow."

Her voice dwindled down to muteness.

"What happened then?"

"Well—after a while—I couldn't work any more. But I had made friends with a nurse in the hospital. She helped me. And then there was Eve."

The youngster in Tom's lap stirred restlessly when she heard her name.

"Here's I, Muvver," she announced.

"Yes, dear, there you are," Gilda reassured the baby. "I don't know why I called her Eve." Her

thoughts took the tangent without pause. She was speaking without restraint, unbosoming her words with all the sense of freeing herself from these things which she had kept restrained, locked up, for these long years.

"I guess it was because the name was short—and plain and honest. Not like mine—not with a lot of frills."

"You have a name that sounds like you," Tom observed. He meant it in kindly way.

"Yes—like the stage—"

"Oh, I didn't mean that way! I meant—"

"Oh, I know! But that's how it sounds; and when Eve was born, I wanted to keep her away from all that—the theater—jazz—night parties—

"I studied—I worked hard—so that I could take care of her without having her grow up in road-show hotel rooms, and a theatrical trunk for her home—and picking up her education from some ham actor—"

Gilda paused in her narrative and glanced around the room. Its business-like air, the suggestion of activity, of importance, of functioning as a well-oiled machine, was in welcome contrast to all that she had been describing of the theatrical world.

"And now I want to work for you," she concluded simply, "so here I am."

Tom regarded her tentatively. He had been stirred, deeply so, by her words, and compelled to an admiring pity at the fight she had put up against the world. It was the harshness of this phase of it that made him ask:

"Surely there's no need of your suffering hardship? The Trevelyanys, I know, would gladly be of assistance."

"No—no! Never that! Not—from them!"

"But what about the baby?"

"Let them have anything to do with her? With my Eve? No! No! She's mine—she's part of me—and before my Arthur died they'd have nothing to do with me. Now they shan't have anything to do with her!"

"But won't you let me tell them about you—let them know of the baby?"

"I couldn't! If you did, they'd come after her, and then I'd have to run away. I—I don't want to run away from things."

Perforce he must do as she asked; her ultimatum left no alternative. Hers was the human side of the matter, he saw clearly. And yet, as he held the baby in his arm, he twinged with the sharp pain of knowledge that Eve, and Arthur Trevelyan, and the sister, Lorraine, were all in the same blood-bond. It was with keen poignancy that he pressed his hand where it lay on Eve's chubby knee.

The baby, roused by the pressure, sensed something of the tenderness Tom felt for her. She glanced up at his face and studied it meditatively; then reached upward and drew her hand across his cheek caressingly. The next moment she had withdrawn her hand quickly, and made a little *moue* of distaste; his half-day's growth of unshaven beard had scratched her flesh.

"He's got stickles over him," she informed Gilda.

Still holding the baby in his arms, Tom arose from his chair. He smiled reassuringly to Gilda, and said:

"You know your own way best—of course, I'll say nothing to the family."

"Oh, please, please don't," Gilda begged. She too had risen. Then:

"And the position?"

"I'd forgotten all about it," Tom replied. "That is, I've decided long ago that you're the one person in the world I wish to have working with me. You can start tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow morning," Gilda promised. She took the baby from Tom's arms and placed Eve on her feet. They started toward the door.

"Don't forget to say good-bye," was Gilda's warning as they reached the doorway.

"Goo'-bye," the baby lisped, "I glad to met you."

"It has been my gladness," Tom returned in all seriousness. Eve ducked her head with gravity, and then, with her mother, was gone.

## CHAPTER XXIII

THE reading lamp near a window of Lorraine Trevelyan's boudoir shone like a friendly beacon across the grounds of the Trevelyan home. Except for its welcoming beam the house was in darkness. It was late. Only a shaded illumination from what Arthur Trevelyan knew to be the servants' quarters gave sign of other life in the residence.

For weeks Arthur had been waiting for this opportunity to approach Lorraine. Vainly at various times he had employed ruses by which he thought to elude the vigilance of Murphy; but each attempt had brought only failure; and sooner or later, in each effort he had found Murphy close behind him.

This time, so far as he could tell after a long circuitous journey in which he had hoped to throw Murphy off the trail, the coast was clear. He moved from the protection of the pine trees along the drive and came to a position beneath the window.

He groped downward to the gravel path and grasped a handful of pebbles. The tinkling impact upon the pane following his motion told him that his aim was correct. He waited a moment, and tossed another pebble.

This time there was the grating of a window-sash in opening, and the figure of Lorraine, in negligee, was silhouetted against the light.

Hoarsely he whispered her name. "It's Arthur," he called in muffled tones.

"Oh! One minute."

Her figure disappeared, and then threw another shadow when she returned.

"Here!" she warned. Her outstretched arm was holding something small and white. She released it, and it came fluttering toward the ground.

Eagerly Arthur grasped the object she had dropped. In his hands he discovered one of Lorraine's handkerchiefs, one end knotted into a latchkey.

"Quick! The front way!" she told him, and Arthur, moving cautiously, hurried toward the door.

At the entrance of the Trevelyan grounds one who had been watching shifted his position.

"Huh!" soliloquized Murphy. "I didn't think he had it in him! An inside job, an' the frail framin' it for him! An' him tryin' to swing it without me!"

A transient tinge of memory passed through Arthur's mind as he fitted the key into the door and turned the latch. How many times, he remembered, he had eased himself into the house, hoping not to be heard by his father! How conditions were changed! Now he was a fugitive, afraid even to enter his own home publicly! But as the door gave to his pressure, memories were forgotten in his eagerness to rejoin Lorraine. He stepped rapidly inside, leaving the door ajar.

Lorraine was there waiting, standing with outstretched arms near the head of the stairs. There was a quick embrace, and then, each filled with emotion to overflowing, they moved toward her

room. A moment more, and they were behind the sheltering safety of her boudoir.

Meanwhile Murphy, skulking to the entrance to the house, regarded the opened door speculatively.

"He's a wise kid at that," Murphy decided. "Leaves the door open for a quick getaway."

Upon the divan where Lorraine and Arthur had found seats, the two sat for a moment in a silent ecstasy of reunion. His arms were around her, and she, seated beside him with her shoulders turned so that she faced him, lay in the strong support of their cradling embrace. His body swayed from side to side, cuddling her.

"My big brother!" she murmured. "Back home! My big brother!"

"Oh, Lorry! Lorry! You don't know! It's been so long!"

"I know."

"The time I've waited—the days, and months, and years—waiting. My God! The waiting! Waiting there in that prison!"

"My poor big brother!"

"And all the time wondering, and being afraid—"

So they talked; and presently, after their hunger for each other had been lulled to a tranquil breathing-space, and after each had asked and answered the dear, inconsequential questions about each other, their thoughts recurred to the present. It was Arthur who spoke.

"Tell me, dear, about your engagement—I saw in a paper the other day—it was some society gossip—tell me, *have* you broken it off?"

She did hope that Arthur would not have known of the unfortunate conclusion to her romance with Tom. She had supposed that Arthur never need learn of this.

She summoned a smile that he did not see was forced, and spoke brightly of the matter. It would never do for Arthur to have an inkling of the fact behind the disruption of her happiness—that it had been Arthur who, however innocently, had been the cause primarily for the broken engagement.

She brushed her hand to his lips to silence his questions, and replied:

“Don’t think of that—we just weren’t suited for each other. We found it out in time, and like sensible folk, admitted it. That’s all there is to it.”

But despite her words, she felt a sadness—the same sadness that had kept with her the watches of the night, when for hours she had lain awake and unhappily lived again in the disastrous moments of her crash with Tom. . . .

She tossed her head to shake away her thoughts. As if supplying a happy ending to her brief dismissal of her love-story, she added:

“Now I have you again!”

“And I have you!” Arthur’s response arose.

Questions again. What about Father? Was he as stern as ever? No, Dad had changed greatly. Poor Dad—he has grieved greatly over Arthur’s death—why could he not know the truth? Well—later, probably; right now there were several reasons why— And what ever became of the old crowd? Has she heard anything of them? And Dumplings is the proud mother of twins, and Lorraine doesn’t

see much of them any more, and Harry is a settled, serious, bachelor. Until—

“But what are you going to do? Where will you live? Are you comfortable where you are? Won’t you need things?”

The fine forgetfulness of danger in the joy of the moment was manifest in his reply.

“Oh, you mustn’t worry about me,” he told her. “I’ll be all right.”

“But you’ll need money. Wait—”

The thought of material necessities brought her to her feet. She rose quickly, crossed to her dresser, pulled open a drawer, and groped inside it. When her hand emerged it was holding a small, exquisitely enameled jewel-case. She carried the miniature strong-box with her as she returned and resumed her seat beside him.

“See, big boy! I haven’t any cash—you know how Dad insists on my having charge accounts everywhere—but if these will help you—”

She drew the graceful strands of a pearl necklace from the box, and two or three platinum and diamond rings lay in her palm.

“Here, dear—take them. I don’t need them—truly. I never wear a thing like those.”

He shook his head.

“No, Lorry. I—can’t.”

“Why, dearest? There’s nothing of mine to which you’re not welcome.”

“I know, little Lorry. It isn’t that. But, but—you see, I’ve had plenty of time—in *there*—to realize how foolish and weak I was. If I hadn’t been

so willing to take things that were offered to me—well, I just can't."

"But surely this is different! It's just to help you get on your feet. To give you a start, until you can build yourself up—somewhere—and be secure again."

"That's just it, dear. I *can't* build myself up 'somewhere' and be secure. I've learned. I know. I've been with men, men like this one with whom I escaped, and I know it can't be done."

"What can't be done?" Her question was fearful, as if she felt this new happiness of hers about to be taken from her.

"You can't build up unless you've got a foundation. I—Lorry, I hate to tell you this—but I'm going back!"

"*Back*—back to that place?"

"Yes."

"Arthur—how can you? Go back and face all that misery, and torture again?"

"I've got to. I must. No matter what I did, or how well I got along, all the time I was hiding away somewhere I'd have the dread of being found out. It would be hanging over me, and worse than the prison itself. I've seen. In these last few days—with these crooked people I've had to live with—I've heard enough . . . . No, Lorry. I *had* to see you! I had to come back home—but it won't work."

"But what will you do?"

"Just go back—and finish my sentence. Then I *can* start building."

The logic of his words was apparent, but their very finality made her willing to use any argument to keep him from carrying out such a harrowing program.

"Dear, do you really mean that?"

"Yes, Lorry."

"There's nothing I can say— Oh, you know how much I would love to have you near me—even if you did have to be careful about seeing me."

"Nothing, dear. I've got to."

She played her trump card.

"There's something else—before you do as you say."

Curiously he watched as she rose again from his side. This time she moved to a cedar-chest in a corner of the room and produced a small, compactly wrapped bundle. He met her at the table. Slowly, with a sense of the importance of what she was about to do, she placed the bundle on the table, and with Arthur standing beside her, began to unwrap it.

The little baby smock which Smooth Sullivan had brought to her was at the top of the heap of carefully folded garments. She picked it up, handled it tenderly, fingered the trace of embroidery, and placed it to one side.

Arthur's face was a study of astonishment and wonder. He looked inquiringly at her. Her eyes met his for a moment, and then she resumed her exhibition of the articles. The pair of toe-scuffed shoes came next. She lifted them from the table, holding them by their tops, and held them out to him. His outstretched hand received them, and she

dropped them into it, where they stood on their tiny soles on his trembling palm.

He stared in growing wonder at the strangeness of her actions. He looked at the shoes as if to see explanation stitched into their seams. Then he glanced back again at her.

Steadily she regarded him for a moment, and her lips parted. She breathed, rather than asked:

“Did you know? Were you ever told?”

He could only shake his head dumbly and echo her question. She continued:

“Did you know of Gilda—and the baby?”

The momentous news in her question swept him off his feet. The pulsing artery in his neck throbbed violently for what seemed an hour before he could frame a reply. Then it was to ask:

“Hers?”

Lorraine nodded in confirmation. The thoughts were not coherent now, but were kaleidoscopic, jumbled—like ice-floes bobbing up and down, jostling, rushing, in a torrent. Hers. Gilda’s. The baby’s. The shoes absorbed him. They were so tiny—so—so. He could not fix them in his mind. And then the thought:

“Ours!”

The word seemed to crash through his mind with its significance.

“Ours?”

This time he repeated it as a question, and Lorraine nodded again. The sound of the word was comforting and he played with it on his tongue.

“Ours—our baby.”

It was too virile a realization for him to bear with composure. Blinely, with the tears coming unashamed, he turned to Lorraine and rested his bulk heavily upon her, with his arms thrown over her, and his face buried in her hair. She stood there for a moment, and then bore him back to his seat upon the divan. . . .

But moments passed, and the balsam of time brought respite from his anguish of spirit. Her hand paused in its act of stroking his hair, and she glanced at the jewelled watch upon her wrist. Her gasp of dismay roused him from his reverie.

"It's late," she told him. "Dad will soon be coming home."

"I must run now, then," he agreed. "I'll come again as soon as the coast is clear."

"Arthur, promise me! You won't—you wouldn't think of going back to—that place—without letting me know ahead of time?"

"Oh, Lorraine! Don't you see? How *can* I go back now?"

She saw. She knew what was in his mind, and what he was next going to say. It was that for which she had hoped when she showed him the baby's clothes. But she concealed her wile.

"You're—not going!" Her tone of voice exulted.

"I can't! It's impossible—now! I've got to find her first—find her and the baby. I've got to keep hidden, until I can find them, and take care of them. Why, she may be in want—destitute—"

"And I'll help you hunt! I have, already, but I didn't know where to begin—"

"Neither do I, but I'll find out. Then, when I've located them, I can finish up my term while you're looking out for them— Will you?"

"I will—I will."

She clasped his hand in token of her promise. Her fingers felt the fuzzy fringe that lined his sleeve and curiously she examined it.

"See—your clothes—you need new ones."

Arthur glanced at the shabby, shiny cuff with unconcern.

"It doesn't matter."

"But it does. You need better things, to help you hunt. I saved all your clothes—in there—"

She motioned toward her bed-chamber adjoining and urged him toward the draperies of the door between.

"Hurry, while you have the time, and slip into something else."

"You're right. You always were right, Lorry."

As he strode into the bedroom to make the change, she returned to the table. There, with an infinite care and fondness, she began to fold up the tiny garments, to place the shoes side by side, nested, to re-wrap the bundle.

At the entrance to the house a stealthy figure moved from the protection of the driveway.

"It's a funny game he's playin'." Murphy muttered. "Whatever it is, I'm in on it, an' if he's double-crossin' me—"

Impatiently he moved toward the door. He patted his hand on his hip, and felt reassuringly the

metalled outlines beneath his coat. Then he crept up the steps, noiselessly swung the door open, and passed inside.

Lorraine knelt beside the cedar-chest and placed away the treasured package. She closed the lid slowly, aware that she was bringing an end to a chapter portentous in her brother's life.

From the hallway outside came a muffled sound. In the haste of their reunion, she saw, she and Arthur had left the door to her room open. She sprang quickly to her feet. Her thought was all for Arthur; her father's voice, she expected, would be heard the next instant, and it would be necessary for her to act adroitly to prevent exposure of Arthur's presence.

The following moment her fears were of more blood-congealing kind. The door was being pushed open by someone in the hall—someone who moved without the candor of honest purpose—someone whose impending entrance meant danger—horrors.

Her face became transfixed with fright. Her eyes were focused upon one thing. Grasping the edge of the door she saw a hand—a strangling, brutal hand whose three fingers screamed of mutilations.

## CHAPTER XXIV

MURPHY pushed the door a little further ajar, and then paused to reconnoiter. Beyond that door, he figured, somewhere were Arthur and his frail, probably engaged in a little billing and cooing before Arthur beat it with the works.

Lorraine's room was the only one he had seen whose lighted interior indicated occupancy. He heard no sound of moving about.

Warily he gazed through the partly opened doorway. The usual furnishings of a woman's room impressed him with their wealth, although their simplicity displeased him because they did not seem to promise much in the way of plunder.

His gaze swept the space before him. Then his eyes became riveted, intent. Upon the divan, where it had been discarded, was Lorraine's jewel-case. Half hanging out of it was the string of pearls she had shown to Arthur. Here was his meat. Strange that it was not already in Arthur's pocket. No telling what a goofy guy like him would do, though.

His fingers tightened spasmodically, with a primitive impulse to grab, upon the edge of the door. His free hand groped for his pocket. He drew his pistol from its keeping-place and tossed it, to limber his muscles, in his hand. Then he stepped forward.

As he stepped into the room Lorraine shrank back, her feet striking the edge of the cedar-chest.

Her whole body recoiled in horror from this menace. Murphy's sweeping glance told him that she was alone in the room. He had been surprised to see her there, but her presence was not dangerous. He waved the gun toward her, commanding silence with the motion.

Her hands went to her face. Whatever happened, she told herself, panic-stirred, she must not arouse Arthur, in the next room. Only to let this man get what he sought and then depart, as quickly as possible before Arthur entered.

Murphy stepped toward the jewel-case. His movement brought response from her. Her thought was to press the gems into his hands and motion him from the room.

But he misinterpreted it. At her first motion he raised his gun menacingly and advanced toward her. He'd put the *fearuhgawd* into her, he told himself. He jammed the muzzle of the weapon against her lips so fiercely that the impact made a circular bruise, and hissed into her ear:

"You pull anything, and you'll get what's it!"

Despite the pain and fear, Lorraine managed to summon her senses. She signalled to him with her hands, placing a finger on her own lips, and then nodding to him. Murphy wondered what she meant. Was the girl nuts? he questioned. What was her idea, warning *him* to be quiet? Was she up to some game, her and her sweetie? Puzzled, he repeated his threat.

Lorraine could only nod in acquiescence, and motion him toward the jewel-case. Still puzzled, Murphy moved toward the gems, determined that what-

ever was behind the queer lay, he'd get his and blow.

His hand closed over the enamel. gingerly he raised the lid and peered inside. The stuff was real all right. . . .

Arthur, nearly dressed, reached in the next room for a hair-brush. His hand brushed against an ornament upon the dressing-table, and upset it.

Murphy swirled in his tracks. He located the jingling sound as coming from the room beyond. He moved toward the doorway, his gun poised—

Lorraine screamed. Her pent-up nerves exploded at this threat of harm to Arthur. Her voice quavered with terror and, as quickly, was hushed by her trembling hand upon her mouth.

But it was enough. It carried into the adjoining room. As Arthur, alarmed at her cry, strode toward the portieres that separated the rooms, Murphy wheeled about and sprang toward her, to check the further outcry he thought was coming. He towered over her. His hand held the gun aloft, the butt of the weapon poised to strike downward, flail-like, upon her.

Arthur stepped in the doorway. He paused, astonished, as he parted the draperies, and was frozen with surprise at what he saw.

Something in Lorraine's attitude checked Murphy as he was about to strike. A new expression in the girl's eyes—something that was not of terror for him—warned him. Her glance shifted, and he felt, rather than saw, that she was looking at someone behind him.

He was between two foes. He hesitated a moment, and in that hesitation, lost his advantage.

Arthur grasped a flower-vase, a heavy receptacle, that rested upon a gate-leg table. Lorraine's involuntary cry of warning as she saw him seize the weapon startled Murphy. He turned to see what threatened him from the rear, and as he did so, Arthur hurled the vase.

The missile sped true. Its heavy weight struck Murphy on the wrist of the hand that held the gun. With a whine of pain he dropped the pistol and grasped at his tortured wrist with his other hand.

The pistol clattered to the floor. Spurred by the same primal impulse, each alive to the necessity, the driving importance of being first to grasp it, both men hurled themselves on the floor toward the all-compelling weapon.

Lorraine ran forward as they leaped. She was met by a swirling, tossing, writhing group of torsos, arms and legs. Murphy, Arthur, their bodies locked and entwined, tumbled crazily over the floor in the dual effort of each to hold the other back, and to get the gun.

Muscles straining, hearts pounding, breath coming short and racked, the combatants struggled toward the weapon. Neither was free to strike a blow, though Murphy, elevating his knee, crushed it against Arthur's chest. The agony stung him to superiority of strength for the moment. Arthur turned, twisted, tugged, until a hand was loosed. With a frenzy not of himself he grabbed at the pistol-butt, lying only a few precious inches away.

Then he was forced to pull back his hand and shove aside Murphy's thumb, which was boring, stabbing like a red-hot iron, into Arthur's eye.

Their bodies, wrenched and distorted in grotesque attitudes as of bronzes twisted in the molding, entranced Lorraine with a crazy fascination. They were unreal, fantastic. Of more practical value, she realized that she did not dare strike at one for fear of hitting Arthur.

Momentarily Murphy gained the advantage. He wrenched Arthur's arm behind his back so that Arthur was compelled to loosen his grip on Murphy's wrists; and in that motion the thug grasped lightning-like toward the pistol. But Lorraine, now keenly alert, ran in and ground her heel into his fingers. He grunted with the pain, and her foot tossed the pistol away. She started to run toward it, but Murphy caught at her ankle, pulled, and she lurched to the floor with the others.

And now the three, all tangled together, bruised, torn and bleeding, contended for possession of the pistol. The struggle seemed interminable. . . .

Up the driveway of the Trevelyan home, on his hourly round, approached the night watchman maintained by a private patrol service. As he neared the entrance he paused and stared curiously at the opened doorway. Often late homecomers, careless in their haste to retire, left doors ajar behind them; and it was part of his duty to close them. But such an occurrence was an unheard of thing with the Trevelyans. He wondered about it. . . .

Lorraine, trying to extricate herself from the heap

in order to place the gun in her brother's hands, found herself pinioned to the floor by Murphy's outstretched arm. She bit into the hard, writhing flesh beneath the cloth. She could feel her teeth crushing out the life of the tendons, and Murphy's convulsive twitching.

Then it seemed as if a cosmic upheaval threw her free from the other two; and with her breath driven from her by the power behind the effort, she was hurled sidelong toward a wall. Dizzily she groped to her knees. Her gaze involuntarily turned toward the scene of conflict, and there she saw the two men, each sprawling, each grasping the pistol in frenzied grip.

Their four hands were locked around the butt and barrel of the weapon. Their elbows, knees and shoulders were thrusting, contorting, each trying to throw off the other's grasp. So, with body-thrusts, efforts to entwine a leg and trip the other, the two tugged for the pistol and slowly, straining, tussling, panting, they struggled to their feet.

Lorraine found herself watching Arthur and Murphy with a curious chilled sense of detachment. She was being a spectator at a series of tableaus in which each frozen attitude of horror lapsed into one more starkly hideous. The faces were not those of her brother and a housebreaker; they were caricatures, gargoyles of the kill.

A detail caught her attention. Their hands—their twining, muscle-knotted hands! How oddly the tendons stood out, and how the little bunches of engorged veins made arabesques upon the purpled

flesh! Interesting, that one of the hands was being bent backward, was slipping, sliding, from its protective grasp upon the barrel, while a finger was stealing around a trigger—

Then there was a crashing detonation that rocketed into the room and bounded against the walls. Her ears rang and her eyes were blinded momentarily by a flash of flame.

Outside, the watchman heard the pistol-shot. He leaped across the threshold and into the house.

When Lorraine looked again a thin wisp of acrid smoke was still trailing upward. Arthur, puzzled, bewildered, was staring down at Murphy, who was sinking upon the floor. His arms and legs were sprawling, like a sawdust doll in need of stuffing. His hand was still grasping the pistol. His mouth was open, the lips drawn tightly against his teeth.

He drooped suddenly, and lay still. Aghast, brother and sister stared at the body, and then at each other. Lorraine, galvanized to action, sprang to Arthur and grasped him roughly by the arm.

“Go! Go!” she urged. “Leave this to me!”

Her words stirred Arthur from his stupor. He jerked himself free from her grasp and resisted her efforts to thrust him to the door.

“What! And leave you here with this?”

“But you must! Think! Think what will happen if you are found here—after this has happened!”

She motioned graphically toward Murphy.

“Think what will happen if *you* are here alone!” Arthur retorted.

"No, no! *Don't* argue about it! Go! Quickly, before someone comes!"

"I *can't*, dear! How could you explain it?"

"But I—"

"S-s-s-h!"

His warning signal came at a critical moment. A step at the doorway swung them around. They faced the watchman.

Lorraine, still instinctively protective, began to speak. Before more than a few incoherent words were uttered, Arthur checked her.

He nodded to the watchman, then motioned toward Murphy upon the floor.

"You're just in time, Officer."

Lorraine's sharp intake of breath signalled to Arthur her astonishment at his audacity. Hurriedly, before she could betray the truth of the situation, he continued:

"I heard this lady—" he motioned toward Lorraine as if he had never seen her until that night—"I heard her scream as I was passing the house. When I ran in, I found this man—"

Unnoticed by the group, each intent upon the story Arthur was telling, Murphy had stirred a little where he lay. His eyes opened slightly. There was a glimmer of consciousness in them.

"There was a struggle," Arthur was saying. "He tried to shoot when I went to this lady's defense. While we were fighting, the gun went off—"

"And then you came in," Lorraine interposed. Arthur glanced at her gratefully.

The watchman looked dubiously at the couple, then studied the inert figure on the floor.

"Just in time, huh? I'm thinking I'm too late."

His comment came as a prelude to what followed. Murphy moved. With an effort he seemed to turn on his face. He groaned slightly.

The watchman crossed quickly to the wounded man and, kneeling, bent over him. He lifted Murphy's head from the floor and held him in a relaxed position. The movement served to revive Murphy, and he groaned again, this time more vigorously.

"Quick!" the watchman instructed. "Phone for the ambulance."

"Wait!" Murphy's request came forced and straining. Lorraine, starting in her errand of mercy, heard him and turned toward him.

"He's lying!" Murphy gasped. His eyes sought for Arthur, and fastened upon him with a venomous, malicious glare. "He lies! We were on this job together, an' he tried to double-cross me!"

"Why, how terrible! To say that!" Lorraine was dumfounded. Not dreaming of any association between her brother and this intruder, the accusation came like a thunderbolt. Arthur alone sensed the danger behind it. In a flash he saw the chain of events which loomed ahead as a result of this unexpected reversal to his plans; and the imminence of his identification as an escaped convict tore at him. Only by some good luck and entire silence might this menace be averted.

His eyes caught Lorraine's. There was a pressure of meaning in his glance.

"The man is vengeful because I caught him in the act," he commented. "Of course, Officer, I suppose you must do your duty."

"We'll just wait till the police arrive," the watchman said grimly.

He moved to the phone that stood on Lorraine's desk. Silently, with despair in their hearts, Arthur and Lorraine heard him call the Central Station. There were foreboding and doom in the instructions which he gave.

## CHAPTER XXV

YOUNG Mr. Douglas Furey of the District Attorney's staff was feeling his spurs increase in length and sharpness. He was full of the zeal of ambition and a warming sense of complacency in having handled his first case in creditable manner. His eyes gleamed through their thick-rimmed glasses, and his dapper body was alive with energy, as he completed laying before Tom Stevens the documents he had prepared in his first task as assistant to the Chief Deputy.

It was late afternoon, and the drum and confusion of homeward bound traffic broke into the seclusion of Tom's office with a roar that reverberated down the corridors. A shaft of sunlight, mellowed by an ocean-born haze, shone into the room and dispelled the gloom that usually seemed to linger about this cloister for the confusion of evil-doers.

The illumination, in which bits of dust climbed as on a golden stairway, failed to drive away the depression in Tom Stevens' heart. Ever since the night of the ball he had felt that emotion of emptiness. When it had been reported to him that an unidentified burglary suspect had been arrested in the room of Lorraine Trevelyan, with a supposed accomplice lying perhaps mortally wounded at his feet and Miss Trevelyan hysterically trying to shield the prisoner, the hopelessness of his love for

Lorraine Trevelyan assumed gigantic proportions; for the first photographs of the prisoner had revealed to Tom that the suspect was the man whom he had seen in Lorraine's arms that eventful night when the soothsayer had prophesied trouble. Trouble, indeed, and it weighed heavily upon the shoulders of the Chief Deputy.

But young Mr. Furey, aglow with realization of accomplishment, had none of these misgivings. He was wholly exulting as he informed his superior:

"There's no mistake, Chief! He gives a phony name, naturally; but we've identified him fully as the bird wanted for the Sing Sing getaway. The one he shot was his confederate in the escape. Do you want to see how we've checked him up?"

Tom shook his head.

"I'll rely on your accuracy, of course," he said.

"It's an open-and-shut case," young Mr. Furey continued. "The watchman's testimony that the wounded one, apparently dying, accused this bird of having double-crossed him in a plan to rob the house, is enough, to say nothing of the circumstantial evidence. The jury should convict without leaving the jury-box."

Ah! The optimism of youth! Tom felt centuries older and more disillusioned than his youthful assistant. Deep wrinkles of worry creased his forehead, and his sign of doubt of an easy victory struck alarm in Mr. Furey's hopeful heart.

"You don't think there's any chance for a slip-up?" the assistant queried.

"Every chance in the world," was Tom's discouraging reply. "We don't know who the man is,

though we do know *what* he is, according to the criminal records. There's something behind him—well, never mind that. The point is that if the girl—if Miss Trevelyan sticks to her story that this man ran into the house to save her from a hold-up, and maybe injury, it will be hard to bring a conviction. But we'll try him, and if the jury slips, we'll spring the escape on him, and maybe he'll disclose what it's all about."

"That's the stuff!" Young Mr. Furey assented eagerly. "We win either way, huh? If we miss the first time, we'll fire the other barrel! That's your idea, Chief?"

"That's the idea—though I'd like to win a verdict on its merits—"

The door to the private office opened and Gilda Gay, who had donned her outer wraps, stood in the entrance. She smiled at Tom Stevens, nodded to young Mr. Furey in acknowledgment of his presence, and said:

"I've finished for the evening, Mr. Stevens—is there anything more?"

Tom, with the puzzle about Lorraine and this mysterious person with whom she was involved heavy upon him, was recalled by Gilda's words. He was about to dismiss her for the day, when his glance fell upon the docket that his assistant had left on his desk. He picked up the bulky manila folder, balanced it in his hand, and said:

"Just one little matter—"

Young Mr. Furey took his cue.

"I'll be ready when you are, Chief," he promised.  
"Good night."

Tom's abstracted nod was the only answer, and the novice in legal tourneys departed. Gilda, all attention to her work, forgot the thought of leaving the office, and seated herself beside Tom at the desk.

"Is there anything I can do?" she asked.

Tom was engrossed in contemplation of the papers in the docket. He identified at a glance the statement made by the watchman at the Trevelyan home; the description of the scene as furnished by the detective-sergeant who had responded with the ambulance call; Miss Trevelyan's vehement assertion that the prisoner had entered the home upon hearing her cry for help; and an affidavit by the examining physician at the city jail to the effect that the bullet which had wounded the man identified as Three-Finger Murphy had been fired at extreme close range, the missile ranging upward at an angle that coincided with Miss Trevelyan's description of the struggle.

Significant, however, was the prisoner's refusal to make any statement except to the legal counsel for whom he asked; and most interesting of all were the full-face and profile photographs of the escaped Sing Sing convict which had been supplied by the New York State Prison Warden.

"I was just wondering—" Tom began. He held the docket, with the photographs placed at the top of the sheaf of papers, tentatively in his hand.

"Yes?" Gilda leaned forward with an abstract interest in her work.

"I was just wondering if by any chance you were familiar with other—well, with other persons, we'll say, whom the Trevelyans may have known?"

It was unfair, he knew, to try to learn through Gilda whether she could supply the missing link in this mystery of Lorraine and the other man, but he could not forego the temptation.

"I don't think so," Gilda responded. "As I remember, I never met any of the family's friends. Has your question anything to do with that?"

She motioned toward the docket, reaching out her hand experimentally.

"No—not directly, that is. Still, you might see—"

He was about to hand her the docket. Gilda was on the verge of opening the folder and being confronted with the photographs of her husband, captioned as a fugitive with a price on his head. Then the door clicked open.

"Hello, Muvver! I come to take you home!"

Eve's piping treble pealed laughingly into the room. She stood on the threshold and when Gilda turned at the sound of her voice, ran forward to the shelter of her mother's arms. Where Eve had stood a woman appeared; the caretaker with whom Gilda left Eve in charge during the day.

"Wait, baby!" exclaimed the caretaker. "You mustn't interrupt!"

"It's all right," Tom assured. "Hello, youngster."

"Sh-s-s-h, honey! Mother's busy!" Gilda warned. She had lifted Eve from her lap to the floor and was trying to resume consideration of the business about which her employer spoke.

"If you wish me to look over those, Mr. Stevens?" her words came tentatively.

"It doesn't matter," Tom replied. Several times previously his days had been brightened by these

visits of Eve, and he welcomed this one as a diversion from his worries. Carelessly, he tossed the docket into a desk drawer.

"Then, that's all?" Gilda rose holding the baby.

"I think so—oh, just one minute—"

Tom was groping now for an excuse to play with Eve. He looked desperately over his desk-top.

"If you'll just file away these reports and letters before you go?"

"Of course," was Gilda's reply. "Come, Eve, dear."

"Oh, but you mustn't deprive me of her," Tom protested. "Let me enjoy talking with her until you're ready."

"You're sure she won't be a nuisance?"

"'Nuisance?' She's a blessing!"

Gilda's warmth of smile at his description repaid him for his words. Somehow, he told himself, he was beginning to like this girl who had come from nowhere by such an odd trick of circumstance. Queer—save for an accident, she might have been his sister-in-law. . . .

When Gilda had gone, the baby, as by familiar practice, found a nestling place in his lap. For a while she was intent upon the amusing manner in which seemingly he was able to grasp at his nose and then, while that member of his countenance was still in place, at the same time make it appear to be peeking forth between his first and second fingers.

Presently, by unclenching his fist and disclosing the thumb tucked away to simulate his proboscis, she discovered the trick. She gurgled with delight at the hoax. Then an idea came.

"My Muvver thinks you're nice," she observed sagely.

"Oho! Does she?" Tom did not know whether to take this at its face value, or to discount it because of Eve's enthusiasm.

"Yes—she said so. She said you were almost as nice as my Daddy. Did you know my Daddy?"

"No, Eve. I never knew him. But I wish I had."

"So do I," said Eve. Then:

"If you did know him, would you think he was nice?"

"I'm sure I would," stated Tom.

Strange complexities and pranks of Fate, that gave this man unknowingly the power to juggle with her Daddy's life, while he sat heaping encomiums upon him to please the heart of a child!

"He'd think you were nice, too," went on Eve.

Ask Arthur, seated in his jail cell awaiting trial, how "nice" he would think this prosecutor. . . .

"—and so do I," she added.

The simplicity of her comment came home with force. He hugged her to him. Her softness. Flesh—the same flesh—the blood of Lorraine, transmuted—

And Eve, wise with the wisdom of childhood, wise enough to be frankly curious:

"Why hasn't a nice man like you got little babies of your own?"

Wise Eve. Curious Eve. Amusing Eve.

"Why haven't I?" Tom laughed at first, the question on the surface charming in its simplicity. "Oh, just because—"

"My Muvver says 'because' isn't any answer."

So that wasn't any answer! Wise Eve. Wise with the wisdom of her namesake. "Because!" Because he had been a fool, that was why! Because he had doubted, and had had no faith. How *could* he have faith, with this latest disclosure of what was obviously Lorraine's perfidy before him? Why? Why? He suffered now to the full the sting of that question. Why? Because he could not have faith, and he could not accept without faith, and so—ring-around-a-rosy — ring-around-a-rosy — so the descending spiral of his pessimism swept him, ever in narrowing ellipses, ever toward a point in infinite depths. . . .

Without knowing what he was doing, he placed Eve on her feet and strolled to the window. He mused darkly. His unseeing eyes encompassed the city street. A little group there resuscitated his coherent thought.

An organ-grinder was plying his trade. His unmelodious music-box, perched on a stick like a one-legged man, was hurling forth flatted tones of an old song. Around the itinerant, mechanical player were grouped pigtailed she-urchins and soot-daubed boys. They were staring, stolidly curious, at the organ-grinder. They were children; children alike essentially to Eve; children that were symbols of what-was-not-his-to-be.

"Come here, Eve," he called.

She came obediently to his side. He placed her upon the window-sill and with an arm around her for protection, let her lean forward to enjoy what the other youngsters were having to themselves.

"Sweet Julia O'Grady." Where did the makers

of hand-organs resurrect their tunes? Sweet Julia came to her end in a wheeze of unoiled cog-wheels.

Tom threw a coin. It glittered in the light, struck the paving, and bounced with a metallic clink. A ragamuffin retrieved it, and oddly enough, gave it to the organ-grinder, who doffed his cap in thanks. He started to turn the crank. . . .

Something in the air that rose from the street, distorted by the sound of traffic and flattened by the wheezy reeds of the organ, came with a nostalgia of memory to Tom. He listened. The tune was hauntingly familiar.

“Da-da-de-da — de-da-da. Da-da — de-da — de-da.” It suggested leg-o’-mutton sleeves and the first enthusiasm of the bicycle era. He groped to place the song—the old song whose simple melody had been filed away in an unexercised brain-cell until this time. Then he remembered.

“Mr. Tom!” Eve was demanding attention. “Tell me. Why haven’t you any little babies of your own?”

“I’ll tell you, Eve. I’ll tell you a story.”

He closed the window to shut out the tune that recalled the song, that recalled the words, that recalled Lorraine and himself—but still the thing lilted through his mind. It told its own story, as he was about to tell it to Eve. “La-da-de-da-de-da-da”—“Aft-er—the—Ball—was O-ver”—La-de-da—de-da—

He found himself, reminiscent, with Eve again upon his knee. She was squirming herself into a position to enjoy, with a sybaritic sense of luxury,

the emotions which she expected his story to bring. And he began:

"When I was about your age, my mother used to sing to me—"

He sketched a picture of a Middle-Western "parlor." There was a young woman, garbed in the costume prevalent even before the "straight-front" corset came in, seated at a golden-oak piano. The "period" furniture was of that past-century age when Bryan, and 16-to-1, or McKinley, and a full dinner-pail, were paramount issues. There was a what-not near the piano, prominent on which were a conch-shell, labelled with the name of "Cape May, N. J."; and a souvenir spoon from Niagara Falls.

These were the things which impressed a young boy, who at the time of which Tom spoke, was standing beside his mother at the piano. He listened eagerly, though only partly understanding, as she sang:

After the ball is over,  
After the break of morn,  
After the dancers leaving,  
After the stars are gone,  
Many a heart is aching,  
If you could read them all,  
Many a dear heart has vanished  
After the ball.

When Tom had finished reciting to Eve the words of the song, the youngster looked up into his face with approval.

"That's a nice song, Mr. Tom," she affirmed. "It sound pretty, like music does when my Muvver sings."

"Does it, Eve? Would you like to hear some more?"

"Oh, yes!" She wriggled in a fervor of contentment. And he continued:

Bright lights were flashing in the gay ballroom,  
Softly the music playing sweet tunes,  
There came my sweetheart, my love, my own,  
"Bring me some water, leave me alone."  
When I returned, dear, there stood a man  
Kissing my sweetheart, as lovers can.  
Down fell the glass, dear, broken, that's all,  
Just as my heart was, after the ball.

His voice died out, and the room of the Chief Deputy District Attorney became silent. Eve inspected her diminutive fingers minutely. Tom had not a word.

Eve didn't like this song so much now. She didn't know what it all meant, but it wasn't happy; and she liked happy things, like her muvver's smile, and what her muvver told her of her Daddy. Maybe, she hoped, there might be a happy ending, though she didn't express it by that term.

Accordingly she waited. Tom kept strangely silent. He seemed to be studying now a photograph of a strange lady; a beautiful lady whom Eve did not know. Maybe Mr. Tom had forgotten about his song because he was looking at the lady's picture.

At last Eve ventured another question:  
"Isn't there any more?"

Tom Stevens replaced the photograph in the drawer. He pressed Eve a little closer. For a mo-

ment he tried to bring himself to the point of saying that possibly—only possibly—he might have more of the story to tell later; but his logical, legal mind would not allow the preposition.

“No, dear,” he was compelled to answer. “I’m afraid—there isn’t—any more.”

## CHAPTER XXVI

“**I** TELL you, the incompetency of the police is—is—well, it’s something awful!”

Old Mark Trevelyan was aware of the inadequacy of his denunciation, even as he spoke; but he could not find words to express his indignation that in his own home—his, of all places! the guardians of the peace had been so negligent as to allow one night marauder to shoot down another, in the very presence of his daughter!

He moved restlessly, as he sat in the library with a swollen, cotton-bandaged foot propped upon a chair, and confounded the police department and all its works. The motion cost him a twinge of pain in his gouty foot that added to his indignation at the affront which had been put upon the tranquillity of his home.

“I don’t suppose they ever found out?”

“Found what, Father?”

Lorraine allowed the letter she had been reading to drop in her lap as she turned in answer to her father’s question. There were furrows of anxiety in her forehead; and her eyes had a hurt, worried look in them which Trevelyan, had he been in his usual good form, must have noticed.

“Found about that man who did the shooting,” Trevelyan explained.

“He—he didn’t do the shooting, Father. It was an accident,” she said.

"I don't see why you defend him," Trevelyan objected. "Just look at the trouble you've caused yourself, with all the detectives around asking questions, and everything. Why don't you wash your hands of the matter and let him get what he deserves?"

"I've told you, dear—he came in to help me. I can't do less than the same for him."

She glanced uneasily at the letter in her lap.

"Huh!" There was resentment at the annoyance caused his daughter by the affair, as well as resentment at his own incapacity, which brought Trevelyan's exclamation. "Probably the whole thing was a put-up job, and they got to fighting among themselves."

"Oh, no! There couldn't have been anything like that—this burglar was in the room, and then the other man ran in, after I screamed."

"Sounds wrong, somehow. If I could get around, I'd put an end to it. You've been subpoenaed, too?"

"Yes."

"And you'll have to go to court, and be stared at by a lot of curiosity-seekers?"

"Yes."

"Well!" Trevelyan grunted. "If this foot of mine would let me, I'd be there with you and see that you received proper treatment. Bunch of officious jackanapes!"

Lorraine glanced at the letter again. In the weeks before his coming trial Arthur had managed, through the lawyer whom Lorraine secretly had retained for him, to get word to her that now, more than ever, his identity must be kept hidden lest he be returned to Sing Sing as an escaped convict. It

was the menace of this possibility which had engraved the fine lines of worry on her brow. As she read the lines again, she realized how difficult it was going to be to keep Mr. Trevelyan in ignorance of what lay behind her willingness to testify for this apparent stranger.

"Don't worry so, Father," she persuaded. "I—I don't mind. In fact, it will be so interesting to see how those things are done. And I'm sure I won't be subjected to annoyance."

"That young Tom Stevens having anything to do with it?"

"Why—I don't know. I hardly think so."

As a matter of fact it was the possibility that she might encounter Tom in her role as witness that so alarmed her.

"You wouldn't exactly mind, would you?" Trevelyan still was cherishing a hope that the engagement of Lorraine and Tom might be revived.

"It wouldn't matter, dear, one way or another," she tried to dissemble.

"Huh!" and Mr. Trevelyan resumed his reading.

This suggestion that Tom Stevens might be involved in the prosecution of the case—it was terrifying. She could only hope that Tom, if indeed he were to have a part in the trial, would not recognize Arthur as the man whom he had seen with her on the Armory terrace.

The scales of Justice, how they sway! The sword of Justice, how it strikes! The eyes of Justice—the

blinded eyes, which fail to see that beyond the fact is sometimes something more!

Blind Justice, painted behind the judge's bench, with her scales in the one hand to weigh the evidence, and the sword in the other, with which to execute the law! The law—majestic and supreme; fetish and symbol of man's herd instinct; decisive and ultimate for today; let yesterday's precedents and tomorrow's amendments look to themselves!

The machinery of the law; the gears which mesh to grind alike the grist to catch a petty thief and to preserve the comity of nations; the functionaries of the law, who serve the machine to keep it cumbrously in operation and turn the cogs—now slow, now fast; now smoothly and without friction; now jarringly and with mechanical flaws!

The dignity of the law; the judge, the umpire of the legal game; the bailiffs, clerks, attaches, who keep check of the umpire's rules; the lawyers, those "servants of the court" who move the pawns and make the plays; the talesmen, jurors who decide which adversary won; the spectators, an antiphonal chorus for the bench's quips; the court-room as a whole, huge sublimate of the tribal conclave assembled now to try one man; lastly a defendant, meshed in legal tape.

"—and there he was on the floor, and this gentleman standing beside him, and this lady—"

The night watchman's voice, testifying on the stand, broke into Lorraine's revery. She looked up, to catch the witness' motion toward her.

Beside the witness was Chief Deputy District At-

torney Stevens. The title, she thought, had an unwieldy sound; as heavy and strange as the man who bore it, and who was conducting the direct examination of the witness. She dropped her head for a moment at the watchman's indication of her, and then looked cautiously toward "the defendant's side" of the long table, at which Arthur Trevelyan sat.

The scene had become familiar. Directly before her, the judge upon his dais. To her right, the witness in his chair; still further to the right, the conglomerate jury in its box.

Between where she sat and the judge was interposed the counsels' table. The prosecution, in accordance with custom, had the point of advantage at the end nearer the jury. Her brother, and his attorney, were at the other end. A blue-coated, nickel-buttoned bailiff sat near, and behind, her brother, there to prevent possibility of the prisoner's escape.

Behind her, beyond the railing at her back, was the audience, which buzzed, or sighed, or gasped or giggled nervously, as the drama which the State was staging was unfolded.

"—and this lady," the watchman was relating, "was saying that she had been rescued just in time, and—"

Lorraine watched how skillfully Tom Stevens guided the witness in his narrative; just skillfully enough, she saw, to circumvent the objections of the defense, and still bring out the account desired for the impression upon the jury.

"—and this bird on the floor, he says—"

"I object, Your Honor!"

Arthur's lawyer was upon his feet, waving an impertunate hand toward the judge.

"We submit," the attorney argued, "that the alleged victim of the alleged felonious assault with intent to commit murder with which the defendant is charged is the best witness as to what he said!"

The audience buzzed. There was a knotty point for you! Let's see how the judge would unravel that, now!

The judge raised his eyebrows inquisitorily. It was the State's next move.

The State, in the person of Tom Stevens, moved to the prosecution's end of the counsel table and gathered up an imposing sheaf of documents. He approached the bench, and in a confiding, man-to-man sort of manner, addressed the Court:

"We offer a deposition," he began, "by the physician for the victim of the murderous assault, proving that the victim is too ill to testify—"

"Wait a minute!" insisted Arthur's counsel.

"—and a deposition by the victim," Tom continued, "in which he admits that he and the defendant were engaged in an unlawful undertaking, to wit—"

This was being most damaging, Lorraine could see. She watched sharply for the effect upon the jury of the prosecution's words. She knew that Tom was scoring a point.

She risked observation by stealing a glance toward Arthur. He looked toward her at the moment, and their eyes met. He smiled encouragingly at her.

"Objection overruled," determined the judge.

"Exception." The defense's comment was a formality, for purposes of the record only.

"Continue with the witness," the judge instructed.

Tom Stevens himself had been led astray in his thoughts. He had seen the exchange of smiles between this man whom he was trying and the girl whom he had hoped to wed. It hurt to know of some secret understanding. His heart was heavy as he turned again to the watchman and prodded him with:

"And what did he say?"

"Well, this bird on the floor, he says: 'He's lyin'; he double-crossed me.' "

"What happened next?"

The watchman told. He talked. And talked. . . .

"The prosecution rests."

It was the signal for which Arthur's lawyer had been waiting.

With an air of assurance, an easy-going, confident manner which spoke volumes of faith in his client's virtue and innocence, the attorney for the defense addressed the Court.

"We have only one witness, Your Honor," he said. "We will call—" he paused to heighten the dramatic effect of the name he was about to utter, "—Miss Lorraine Trevelyan to the stand."

Here was the ordeal which Lorraine had feared. Now it was upon her. Her knees trembled a little as she arose; but she steeled her nerves and walked toward the witness chair to take the oath.

She seated herself in the chair and adjusted her position for the inquisition. Her chin held high, her face composed, she chanced a glance around the courtroom to see if she could meet the accumulated stares that were leveled at her like lances. The experiment was encouraging. She found herself cool and calmly gazed in Tom's direction.

No sign of recognition fluttered over her face when her eyes met his. There was only the serenity of a high-born woman who is facing a matter of duty, possibly a trifle annoying. But of the tumultuous emotion which assailed her behind the surface, there was no outward sign.

And Tom, as he received Lorraine's frigid and indifferent glance, returned it in the same measure.

But Arthur's attorney was speaking. She had answered mechanically the formal questions about her name, age, residence, which acted as an overture. Now she must concentrate, must give close attention. . . .

"Tell the jury in your own words, Miss Trevelyan, what happened on the night in question."

Steadily, choosing each word carefully, deliberately trying to make as strong an impression upon the jury as possible, she began to speak. She told how she had been preparing to retire for the night; how by chance she had looked for a certain trinket in her jewel-box; how, while examining it, her attention had been attracted by a sound outside her door; how she had looked up to see a man standing in the doorway; how the sudden start at viewing the intruder had caused her to cry out involuntarily.

She was conscious so far of having done it well. She had all the strength of money, and position, and social standing, at her back; and she knew her words were carrying weight with the arbiters of Arthur's destiny.

"After I screamed—it seemed only an instant—I saw Mr.—"

Abruptly she caught herself. Her heart leaped at the imminence of the pitfall into which she had so nearly fallen. She had been about to utter Arthur's name—to call by name the man whom she was supposed to know only as a rescuer of damsels in distress.

She was nauseated at her narrow escape. To steady herself, she looked toward Arthur. The merest trace of a frown from him cautioned her. To the onlookers it seemed only as if she had directed her gaze toward Arthur to indicate the person of whom she spoke.

"I saw this gentleman in the room." Her statement, in its brevity, regained for her courage to go on. "There was a fight—"

She was half hearing her own words narrate what had happened after Arthur entered the room, and half wondering what their effect was having. As she added details, as she built up Arthur's defense, she was growingly conscious of Tom's steady, narrowing, speculative stare. She tried to throw off the pressure of his gaze.

"They were struggling to get possession of this gun that the man brought with him. Somehow the gun was twisted in their hands. I was watching, frightened—of course. Then the gun went off—"

Tom Stevens found himself waiting for some sign from the defendant's actions which would guide his course. But Arthur gave only surface interest, natural enough for a person in his predicament, in what his witness testified. It was a puzzling, thwarting three-corner drama they were playing.

But as Stevens studied Arthur's face, something inside him kept hinting, whispering . . . . Tom dropped his eyes and gazed reflectively at the shining globular surface of the water-pitcher before him. Only his external ears were attentive to the testimony. His inner consciousness was listening, listening to the whispers. . . .

The globular surface of the water-pitcher itself seemed to suggest. To sketch vaguely. Something globular, and round. Crystal. Round. A crystal sphere. A fortune-teller. A ballroom. A terrace—that was it!

He caught himself on the verge of leaping from his chair in exultation! Now he knew where he had seen this man before! Now he understood what the whispers were trying to say! Now he remembered what this defendant meant to Lorraine.

His vision bridged the gap of memory and brought vividly back the Armory terrace—the night of the ball—Lorraine's uneasiness—the man with whom he caught her—their kiss—the other's flight!

It was all so simple. No wonder he was in her home! No wonder she was trying to shield him!

“—the man who was shot fell to the floor—we stood there watching him—and then the watchman entered—and that was all—”

Abruptly Tom realized that she was ending her

direct testimony; that counsel for the defense was concluding examination; that the judge was directing him to take the witness.

Tom rose to his feet. He knew he could not shake Lorraine's account. He bowed negatively toward her, and then informed the judge:

"No cross-examination."

Arthur Trevelyan raised his head with sudden relief. He had been fearing the ordeal to which Lorraine might be subjected. It seemed almost too good to be true—that his sister should escape.

Lorraine too was puzzled, taken unaware, at the brevity of her task. She look toward Arthur's lawyer for confirmation.

"That's all, Miss Trevelyan," she heard the lawyer say.

Gratefully she started to rise from the stand. Instinctively she smoothed down her dress, the motion gaining time for her to begin the long walk back to her place a few feet beyond. And then she saw Tom Stevens move.

As if struck suddenly with the necessity of attention to some small oversight, Tom unfolded quickly from his chair, and stepped toward her rapidly. His hand was raised apologetically, apparently to halt her before she should be made to take unnecessary steps back to the witness chair. He was looking at her steadily, with a little suggestion of eagerness, obvious intentness upon his work.

She halted at the foot of the raised platform on which the witness chair was placed. He motioned her back toward the chair.

"Just one question, Miss Trevelyan—"

The attorney for the defense half rose from his seat and then subsided again. He was familiar with the old trick of the trial lawyer, and sensed the ruse to take the witness off her guard; but there was nothing he could do.

Lorraine sank into the chair. She settled herself into position and composed herself easily, her hands resting upon the chair-arms lightly. She raised her head and glanced calmly toward Tom.

His face now had lost its benign suavity. He paced across the floor until he reached a position directly in front of her. His expression was stony. The muscles of his face were set and grim.

Arthur Trevelyan stared anxiously, first at his sister and then at Stevens. The silence of the prosecuting attorney was ominous. Why didn't he ask his question and be done with it?

Now his face loomed close before hers, and his eyes commanded attention. She forced herself to meet his penetrating gaze. The pupils of her eyes narrowed, and her mouth was drawn to a fine, tense line. The silence became acute.

Finally Tom Stevens raised his arm. Still fixing Lorraine's gaze upon himself, he motioned in the direction in which he knew Arthur to be sitting. He opened his lips.

The courtroom, aware that the "one big moment" that occurs in every trial of importance now was being enacted, was still and immobile. Far down a corridor a door slammed. All waited for the attorney to speak.

"Miss Trevelyan—" the words were cold and incisive—"did you ever—"

He paused and framed his query in new guise.

"Before the night of the shooting, did you ever—see—this—defendant?"

Ah-h-h! A little anticipatory shiver ran through the audience. There was a keen one! What was this girl going to say now? Whadda yuh suppose he's driving at?

Lorraine, staring into Tom's face, felt herself being bored, penetrated by the steely, driving power of his glance. She saw the trap yawning before her. She fought for composure. Her eyes closed in self-defense.

She knew now the peril that lay in any answer to the question. She knew that *Tom* knew that Arthur was the man seen on the Armory terrace. She was being impaled upon the two horns of a dilemma, from neither of which could she escape without injury.

She opened her eyes and looked pitifully at Tom. If only she could persuade him to take his question back—obliterate it! But already the court stenographer had recorded it. She must choose—must force a decision. . . .

To lie—to answer the question in the negative—to destroy Tom's faith not only in her fidelity of her love, but her honesty of speech?

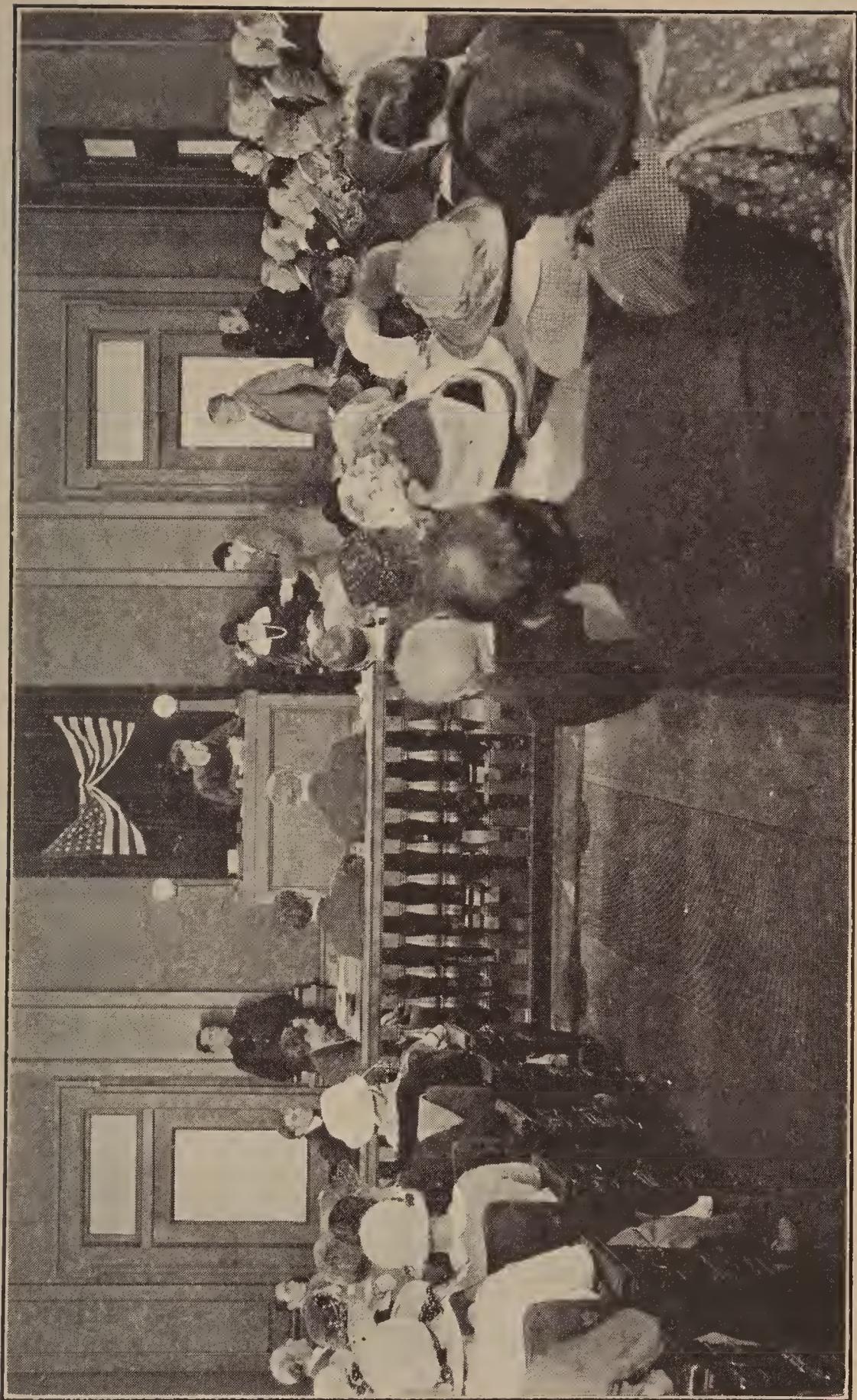
She studied his face as if hoping to find an answer there. His features showed the struggle he was having while he waited.

Something in his expression made her look away. She turned toward Arthur. Her brother was gazing at her, his face shouting silently his realization

A RENCO PRODUCTION

"Before the night of the shooting, did you ever—see—this—defendant?"

AFTER THE BALL





that upon what she would answer must depend victory or defeat in his fight for freedom.

To speak true—to admit having known Arthur—to shatter his carefully built defense—and destroy his future?

Her brother's face—that of the man whom still she loved—the two swam before her. And of the two she made her choice.

She was reserved and distant in thought and manner now. It was as if she were being swept along in a glacier. She glanced back at Tom—caught his eye fairly and placed a world of meaning in her gaze.

"No," she said, and with it there came to Tom a subtle emphasis of the fact that she accepted his challenge—"no—I never saw him before!"

The attorney for the defense clutched at Arthur's arm.

"Lord!" he exclaimed in an undertone, "how gloriously she did it!"

Tom Stevens bowed. He stepped to one side. He regarded her for a moment, his glance telling her he understood what she had done, and smiled with irony. His voice was tinged with bitterness as he said:

"That is *all*, Miss Trevelyan."

Lorraine was dazed with the abruptness with which her ordeal ended. She looked unsteadily toward the jury box. One juror smiled ingratiatingly at her and twirled an enticing mustache. She quickly glanced away. Then shaken and weak, she groped her way to her seat. And the argument to the jury began.

## CHAPTER XXVII

THE scales of Justice, how they sway! What little things can sway the scales of Justice! A woman's smile—

The door of Tom Stevens' office clicked open nervously and Stevens, followed by the young Mr. Furey, stepped disconsolately inside. He flung himself into his seat and his assistant perched himself upon a corner of the desk.

Tom slouched down in his chair, a picture of lost hope. Young Mr. Furey studied him a moment and then wriggled himself into a more pepful attitude.

"Cheer up, Chief," the assistant advised. "There's always a chance, you know."

"Chance? Huh!" Tom's grunt was expressive of his disillusion.

But young Mr. Furey was determined to find some silver lining behind the cloud.

"Anyway, what can you expect of a jury when there's a pretty woman in the case? They'll have a verdict inside of ten minutes."

Tom nodded. So Lorraine had faced the issue, and lied to him to save this man whom he had seen kissing her. . . .

"Besides," the assistant continued, determined to be cheerful, "even if they do acquit him, Sing Sing will be glad to get him."

"Yes—" Tom realized that in the tenseness of the trial he had forgotten this angle. Here was a phase which required thought. He pondered over it a moment and then shook his head.

"There's something behind all this—" he volunteered.

Young Furey nodded sagely.

Still talking his thoughts aloud, Tom resumed: "Whatever does lie behind it, Miss Trevelyan has the answer."

"You're right, Chief. 'Cherchez la femme,' as they say."

"Yes—search for the woman. Only in this case we'll search for what the man means to the woman."

It was a startling thought, evolved while in the process of speaking the words. There came like a clarifying light, a plan of procedure which would satisfy his determination to learn what "the defendant" meant in Lorraine Trevelyan's life. Only by so learning could he hope to endure an existence which promised only many days of lonesomeness without her. Better the lonesomeness without problems and perplexities, than a tiresome round of speculation on what might have been, if. . . .

The way seemed open. He pivoted in his chair, became again the man with the initiative that had won him his present official position, and grew voluble.

"Here's what we'll do, if the jury acquits him—as it will. We'll let him go free—and have him trailed every minute. Sooner or later, he'll meet Miss Trevelyan, you see?"

Young Furey admitted that he saw that far—but he concealed the inability to glimpse beyond.

"When he does meet her, they'll do something—somehow—and we'll get the answer to it all. See?"

This time Furey did see. He agreed enthusiastically to the stratagem. He glowed with excitement as Tom proceeded to unfold the details of his plan.

A court messenger entered the room.

"The jury's coming in, sir," he announced.

Tom rose from his chair.

"I'll leave the details to you," he told Furey.  
"Now let's hear the verdict."

So the trial really was at an end. Lorraine was experiencing a tingling sense as of renewed blood circulation, where before she had been numbed by a paralysis of anxiety. There was first the suspense of watching the jury file into the box; the searching of their faces to try to read the result of their deliberations; the agonizing slowness with which the foreman had handed the slip of paper bearing the verdict to the foreman; the excruciation which had attended the delay while the clerk unfolded the paper, cleared his voice, and finally began to read the formalities of phrases that ran as a preamble to the verdict. Finally:

"We find the defendant not guilty as charged."

Somehow she was walking toward the door. There had been a bustle and commotion following the dismissal of the court and the departure of the judge. She had seen, from a corner of her eye, the congratulations showered upon Arthur by his at-

torney. She had not dared to speak to Arthur lest she betray him by breaking down.

Finally, as she had passed toward the aisle she had met Tom Stevens face to face, and had walked beyond him without a sign of recognition.

Now she was moving, without volition on her part, toward the corridor. Gradually she became aware of a lightness in her heart which previously she had forgotten. She was beginning to appreciate in what great amount the load had been lifted. Arthur was free. She could be happy again. Arthur was free. She kept telling this to herself, over and over. It would take time, she knew, to become convinced of the truth of it all.

Back in the courtroom, while Arthur was saying his farewells to his lawyer, young Mr. Furey was issuing instructions to a detective attached to the District Attorney's office.

"Stick to him," Tom's assistant said. "Don't let him get out of sight of you or your partner. When anything stirs, be sure to phone the Chief."

Arthur started toward the hallway. The detective, casually, unostentatiously, followed.

As usual, Trevelyan Senior was storming. It was a Saturday afternoon, and this time the cause of the storm was the slowness with which his gout attack was disappearing. He could only limp a little; prolonged weight upon his foot brought tortures. So he stumped and fidgetted up and down the library, like a boy kept indoors on a rainy day.

Lorraine entered and placed some autumn roses upon the center-table. She showed the strain of the recent trial and its suspense. She drooped a little. Her face, still lovely, was slightly wan and its pallor was enhanced by the dark hues of the roses.

Trevelyan glared sharply at her.

"You wore yourself out at that fool trial," he asserted.

Lorraine replied in an effort to humor him.

"It was a little trying," she admitted. "Still, it wasn't much for me to do."

"And that fine hero of yours," Trevelyan continued with withering sarcasm, "I suppose has gone scot free. Ever heard from him?"

"Why, no, Father."

"Hadn't the grace to come and say 'thank you,' did he?"

"Probably—he couldn't."

"But you could wear yourself out for him!"

Lorraine threw her arms around Trevelyan and then stood off the better to tug at his mustache. It was the ancient method she had employed since childhood to cajole him into good humor. He grinned in spite of himself. Then he added:

"You're all I have left now—you mustn't be careless with yourself."

"Why, I'm all right, Dad." Lorraine spoke briskly, trying to radiate good health and cheer. But Trevelyan was still in his forebodeful mood. He sighed heavily. Unwittingly he placed too much weight upon the invalid foot.

"Dammit!" he protested.

"Why, Dad!" She rebuked him with a laughing frown. "You shouldn't use such language before young ladies."

"That's just it," he replied petulantly. "I wish—"

"Yes?"

"I wish I had my boy."

There was a touch of yearning softness in his tone which stirred Lorraine's heart to pity and hope. She looked eagerly into her father's face for some sign of less stern an attitude toward the memory of Arthur.

"Do you, Dad?"

"Do I? Of course I do! That's a fool question."

Trevelyan was indignant with her for letting him betray his softness. But as quickly as his bristling fierceness came, so it disappeared. The next moment he added:

"Nowadays I realize—well, I'm beginning to know that much was my fault, too."

"Oh, Dad! Do you mean it?"

"Indeed I do. If I had him again—things would be different—"

She didn't dare trust herself with words. Pensively she pretended to re-arrange the roses.

"If you'd get out in the air, Lorraine Trevelyan, like I'm going to do, you'd have some color in your face, instead of leaving it all to the roses!"

With which Parthian shot Trevelyan stumped away. Lorraine watched him go with mingled emotions. An idea fearful in its possibilities came to her, and she was fascinated with the allurements it unfolded. She studied deeply.

"I'll do it," she determined, then wheeled, ran to her room, and seized the phone.

Over the whispering wires one night in Arthur's voice had come a number to be used if emergency arose. She called this number, in feverish haste now that her course was decided, and waited.

In the fourth floor rear of an obscure furnished rooming house Arthur Trevelyan answered the summons of the telephone bell. As he did so there was a similiar action in a room adjoining his. There the detective-attache of the District Attorney's office picked up a receiving head-set linked to a telephone box whose wires disappeared in the wall separating the two houses. Alert, efficient, the detective listened.

All eagerness now, where before she had been distract and listless, Lorraine told Arthur of her father's words. She was glowing with enthusiasm and there was a lilt to her voice which struck a responding chord in Arthur's heart.

"Is it really true? Did Dad actually say that?"

"Indeed he did! And I think, if you and Father can meet—"

"Do you think I dare risk it?"

"I'm sure of it," Lorraine affirmed.

The detective smiled grimly. Here was what he had been waiting for—some sign of assignation, of rendezvous.

"If it only works!" was Arthur's hope.

"Of course it will work. Come to the side entrance. I'll let you in, and tell you all about it, and then we'll let him find you talking with me. Hurry!"

He hung up the receiver with a haste that made the instrument jingle a protest, grabbed his hat, and ran out the door.

Quickly the detective in turn called for a number. He was connected with Tom's office. Tom, wrestling with a maze of "whereases" and "to-wits" in dictation to Gilda, answered the call. He barked an excited reply when he heard the detective's message.

"Keep after him!" he instructed sharply. "Keep him spotted all the time. Cover the house. Watch for me. I'm on the way!"

An excited Chief Deputy whirled his chair toward his secretary.

"Get this, Miss Gay! Whatever happens, don't keep out of touch if I should call. I'm going to Miss Trevelyan's home—"

"To Miss Trevelyan's! The witness in the Three-Finger Murphy case?"

"That's it! I'll be there! There's something breaking, and it's what I've been waiting for! Stick here until you hear from me!"

He blew out of the office like a cyclone. Gilda watched after him in amazement. What on earth at the Trevelyan home could make him so excited? She wondered if Miss Trevelyan were in danger. . . .

"Miss Gay!"

She looked up, startled, to see the office attache in the doorway.

"There's a hospital case in the jail, Miss Gay, that wants to make a statement," the attache informed her.

"But I can't leave the office now," the girl objected. "It's Mr. Stevens' orders."

"It's important, Miss, according to the nurse. It's Murphy—the one who was shot in that hold-up case. The nurse says he's had a turn for the worse, an' wants to see somebody."

"But I can't go away from here—oh, I don't know what to do!"

"You'd better go, Miss Gay," the attache urged. "I'll stay here at the phone. If there's any need, I'll call you."

Hurriedly, wondering what it was all about, Gilda seized her notebook and pencil, and rushed away.

Meanwhile, with the detective at his heels, Arthur Trevelyan sped homeward to meet his father at last.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

ARTHUR TREVELYAN leaped up the steps of the service entrance toward the opened doorway, where Lorraine was framed in a new radiant loveliness. Her hands were beckoning him back to his home. Then their clasps met, and they were holding each other in embrace, oblivious to who might see.

From his point of observation the District Attorney's detective smiled sourly at the signs of affection.

"The Chief should have seen that," he commented to himself. "But he'll hear about it soon enough."

Through a rear passageway, across the lower hall where he had last been in such tragic circumstances, and into the library, Lorraine led her brother. She glanced quickly about as they entered the room. Mark Trevelyan was not in sight.

"Dad's in the garden," she told Arthur. "He limps around, complaining of his gout and the rose-bugs."

"Are you sure he'll be glad to see me?" Arthur was more uneasy than before about the success of this venture, now that the test was soon to come.

"Of course I'm sure. He'll be swept off his feet with happiness. I know—I can tell from the way he speaks. He hasn't the faintest idea that you are still alive."

"You can't imagine, Lorry, what it means," he told her. "It's just recently that I've begun to feel alive again. If I can square myself with Dad, and make that part of it all right, I can set about finding Gilda, and the baby."

"It's so wonderful to have you free from all that trouble and uncertainty of the trial," she told him.

"Isn't it! It seemed to have been hanging over me for centuries. And if it hadn't been for you, I'd be doing time again."

"Why, I didn't do anything—" she protested.

"You did everything! It was your bravery that saved me. It was glorious, the way you faced that lawyer and denied that you had ever known me—"

"Was it?" Her reply came faintly. Memories of that lie to Tom had been haunting her, helped to account for the worry-lines around her shadowed eyes.

"It certainly was! But—why do you suppose he asked that question? Lord! I thought the game was up. Do you think he suspected anything?"

"Suspected?" Lorraine was being confronted with a recurrent worry. She knew that if Arthur learned how much that lie mattered with her and Tom, the happiness of her brother's freedom would be sadly marred. So she saw herself of necessity telling another lie to cover up the first.

"No—I don't think he suspected anything. Probably it was just a chance shot—an effort to find something, somewhere."

"I suppose so." Arthur gladly let the matter drop.  
"But now tell me all that Father said."

While Lorraine recounted Trevelyan's wistful longing to have his son returned, another figure joined that of the watcher outside the house. The detective nodded in salutation as he recognized Tom Stevens.

"We've got him spotted here, Chief," the detective stated. "He went up to the side entrance, where the young woman who testified for him at his trial was waiting for him. They were very affectionate with each other. Then she took him inside."

Tom's face darkened at the information. It was hard for him to convince himself that all these things did not concern someone else than the girl for whom he still retained this hopeless, tormenting love. There remained only to put the finishing touch that would despatch for good and all any hope that might still linger of happiness for him with her.

He came to this decision. He would not torment himself further—he'd put an end to doubt.

"You wait here," he told the detective, harshly. "Don't let him slip away. When I need you I'll send or call for you. I'm going inside."

"Be careful, Chief," the detective warned. "This bird has been in two shooting scrapes. Better let me go with you."

"I'll take a chance," Tom Stevens answered grimly. "If he does shoot, well—"

He hurried to the main entrance of the Trevelyan home. A maid appeared, and recognized him as a former caller on Miss Trevelyan. She ushered him into the foyer, where he stood waiting.

Arthur's face was alight with the expectation of meeting his father. Lorraine's words had convinced

him of Mark Trevelyan's change of heart; and now only remained the exquisite thrill of re-union. . . . The maid appeared.

"It's Mr. Stevens, Miss," the maid announced.

Lorraine's suddenly whitened face told Arthur what she feared.

"The—the Deputy District Attorney?" he asked her. She nodded.

Lorraine nerved herself to a semblance of outward calm.

"Tell Mr. Stevens," she instructed, "that Miss Trevelyan is not at home."

But the maid lingered.

"He says it's important business, Miss Trevelyan."

Lorraine hesitated. Terrifying fears assailed her. Tom's call could only mean one thing—that Arthur was again in jeopardy. She turned impulsively toward her brother.

"Quick!" she urged him. "Get out of sight. Here, in the next room."

"No!" Arthur replied. "I'll meet him here. He can't do anything."

"Oh, he mustn't see you here," Lorraine argued. "Don't you understand? We weren't supposed to know each other. Please, won't you wait inside? You can hear, if you like—but be on the safe side."

"But I can't go on hiding all my life!" It was too much of the same old routine for Arthur to endure. He preferred to face Tom Stevens and thresh out what lay ahead.

"Just once more, Arthur—then everything will be all right. Please! Hurry!"

Arthur allowed himself to be led into the music-room beyond. The maid was still standing where Lorraine had forgotten her. Now the distraught girl summoned all her courage to her aid.

"Show Mr. Stevens in."

Lorraine was standing, icy and aloof, when Tom Stevens entered. He bowed soberly to her. She did not offer her hand, or ask him to be seated. On her feet, ready for whatever development might occur, she spoke with cutting chill.

"I am indebted for your visit—but to what purpose do I owe it?"

This was a reception which Tom had not expected. He did the unexpected, breaking through her artificial calm with his protesting words.

"Why speak like that, Lorraine? You know why I have come—"

"You have had so many unbased ideas—" she evaded.

"Unbased! Unbased, when I learn that the same man over whom we quarreled—the same man whom I saw kissing you the night of the ball—"

Arthur, listening intently, started with surprise. This was something of which he had not dreamed. He drew a little closer to the drapery which separated him from the two in the adjoining room.

"—the same man who was found in your home, and whom you so successfully defended at his trial—is now in this house after having received your affectionate welcome! And you say my ideas are unbased!"

This was pure male jealousy on his part, Lorraine was sure; the act of a man driven to desperate

lengths by his irrational broodings. If she could talk him out of it, shame him into a retreat—

“So you have stooped to spying on me?”

“Not spying on you, Lorraine. I—was not willing, but acquiescent—in your desire to have this man to yourself without my encumbering presence—”

Arthur’s astonishment grew at realization that this man talking to his sister apparently regarded him as a rival in love. How complicated the whole matter seemed!

“But when I am involved officially,” Tom continued, “it is a different matter. You bore false witness, relying on your knowledge that I would not expose the falsehood.”

Lorraine could only droop her head. She knew the reproof was justified.

“You expected me to shield you in the courtroom. You knew I would do so, and you took advantage.”

(The lie was coming home to roost with a vengeance!)

“You must admit that I have a right to an explanation.”

It was an intolerable situation. She could see only one way out: to tear to shreds what little unblemished opinion he still had of her, and brazen it out until he left in disgust. She took the plunge.

“Very well!” she suddenly flared. “Since you insist—your ideas are correct. It is true that this man is dear to me—dearer than you, or anyone else—can ever be!” (Thank God she did not have to lie about this!) “Why wouldn’t I lie, do anything, to help him!”

Tom shrank back, dizzy with shock. He had not expected that the Lorraine he knew could be so vehement. He was stunned and sick at heart. Now that he had brought this upon himself, he regretted having done so. He could sense only a loss of everything. Nothing now mattered.

"Very well," he responded, dully. "That seems to be definite enough."

She was thankful that he did not look toward her for confirmation of his implied question.

"You leave me no choice," he added. "I must inform you that this person for whom you have gone to such great lengths is an escaped Sing Sing convict—"

"Oh-h-h!"

It was as if he had struck her. She seemed to wilt, like a flower exposed to sudden, scorching flame.

"I'm sorry." He could not help being torn by the anguish in her face. "I am not saying this just to cause you pain. It is an office matter."

"You—you knew?"

"All the time!"

"And you have tortured us by letting him go, by playing as a cat does with a mouse? Oh! How could you have the cruelty?"

"I have not been playing. It was, as I say, an office matter, and one of duty. The man is an offender against the State."

"But why do you come now, after apparently everything was going to be all right, to tell me this?"

"Can't you see?" He hated to have to tell her in cold blood.

"You mean?" She was in cold terror.

"Yes—I have come to take him back."

"Tom! Tom Stevens! You wouldn't do that! You *couldn't!* You couldn't hurt me so! It would kill me! Why, I—I couldn't live!"

She had forgotten her role of a brazen admission of a love-affair, and was pleading, genuinely now, for her brother's safety, unmindful of course that Tom could only see a woman fighting to save her sweetheart.

"Tom! It doesn't matter what you think about me—oh! it does matter, but I can't help it! But don't take him away! You've told me you loved me—think, Tom! Think what you're doing to that person whom you told you loved!"

She was beside herself with agitation. She was clinging to his hand. The tears were streaming down her face unrestrained.

He drew back. The situation was becoming impossible. He must do something, say something, to bring her to herself.

"Please!" he interrupted. "I have read of such things—and if I could comply I would do so to save you all this—"

"Won't you? Won't you, Tom?"

Very well. He must shock her with words.

"It is amusing, isn't it?" He was speaking deliberately, choosing his phrases with care. "Quite a situation—a woman begging her former sweetheart to stultify himself and save her present—lover!"

The thing had the sting of a whip-crack. Lorraine felt beaten, bruised.

"Tom—I can't—please—"

"Wait a minute!"

The new voice in the room brought Tom's head up sharply. He looked toward the music-room and glimpsed the man of whom he had been talking. Here was a species of effrontery with which he could deal.

It was a determined, commanding Arthur who advanced toward Tom Stevens. The two men—one a brother indignant at the torture to which his sister was being put, the other enraged at being confronted by an apparently successful rival—each braced himself for the impact of blow that seemed about to come.

"I would retire in your favor—if I could." Tom spoke icily. "Unfortunately, I am compelled to remain in your company. I'm sorry if it annoys—Miss Trevelyan."

"Stop that!" Arthur's voice compelled obedience. "That will be all along that line."

Tom looked up, surprised at the tone of righteousness in Arthur's voice.

"I know now," Arthur began, "why you asked her if she had ever seen me before the night of the shooting. I didn't realize—" he turned to Lorraine. "I didn't understand, Lorry, that I was the cause of your broken engagement—"

Lorraine moved a hand wearily. That was so small a part of the whole dismal muddle.

"But I do understand why she let you think—she was trying to shield me, because if you learned who I was, you would learn that I was a convict—that I had escaped. She wanted to save me, that was all."

"Naturally." Tom wondered why this man was stating such obvious things.

"She wanted to save me—and couldn't justify herself without disclosing my identity. It's all mixed up. You don't need to know now, but it is a long matter. But I'll tell you this: she wanted to save me because—"

"Arthur!" Lorraine's voice cut in pleadingly. "Don't! Don't ruin yourself at my expense."

"It's all right, dear," replied Arthur evenly. "It's just as well to get it over with. It's because—" he resumed his attention to Tom, "*I am her brother.*"

"What!"

"It's true."

"Lorraine, tell me!" Tom, all at sea, overwhelmed with the news, turned anxiously toward Lorraine. "Is that why you let me think—"

Lorraine nodded. It was an effort to move.

"And I accused you! I've said these things! Oh, Lorraine! I'm not worth—why, I'm beneath your feet! Is that why you asked me to wait?"

Again the nod, dispirited.

"And I wouldn't trust you! I—I—oh, no wonder you must hate me!"

She shook her head. "I don't hate you—only—" "Don't you, truly? Can you forgive me at all?" "Yes—I can."

"And you!" Tom swung toward Arthur. "I've heard so much about you—I've thought you were dead—I don't understand it all—and now to have to take you back to prison—"

"Tom—you don't mean you still will do that?"

It was Lorraine speaking. She had forgotten all about the prison angle.

“I’ve—got to.”

“And you say you love me?”

“Oh, I do—now more than ever! But I must—”

“Oh, you’re hateful! I despise you!”

“Here, what’s all this?”

Mark Trevelyan’s booming voice echoed through the room. He stood inside the doorway, poised on one foot, balancing himself with his cane. The others turned to face him, and then Mark Trevelyan forgot about his gout.

“My boy! My son! Arthur!”

He flung away his cane, and it twirled clattering into a corner. For a step or two he tried to hobble over, but this means of locomotion was too slow. He hopped, took a stride or two, then ran to where his son, with arms outstretched, awaited him.

“My boy! My boy!”

Father and son, they stood with arms wrapped around shoulders and with cheeks pressed firmly together. Mark Trevelyan was sniffling and choking in a spluttering effort to keep back the tears; finally he gave up the effort unashamed.

“My boy! My only son! Back home!”

## CHAPTER XXIX

**I**N THE hospital wing of the county jail Gilda Gay sat at the bedside of Three-Finger Murphy, who lay on the cot feebly speaking the words which Gilda's flying fingers were recording. At the foot of the bed stood a nurse, while an interne, on the other side of the bed, frequently felt Murphy's pulse for signs of weakening.

There had been a rambling, half-delirious recital of Murphy's early antecedents and criminal career. The words automatically became transformed into pothooks and dashes under Gilda's guidance. Her thoughts were elsewhere.

Suddenly she found herself becoming increasingly engrossed in what the dying man was saying. There was a suggestion of something familiar, of matters of which she had heard vaguely, in his account.

“—and I knew all along,” Murphy struggled to say, “that the bird they pinched had nothin' to do with the shootin' in Central Park—it was me. I had a pal, an' he tried to give me th' gate—and I bumped him. It was him or me—”

Gilda's mind was leaping backward over the years to the time when she and Arthur were in New York—

Wheezing, pausing to gather strength for enunciation, Murphy continued:

“The only way I can figure it out is that the bird I bumped off—this Soapy—must have changed

clothes with someone to throw me off his track—and that's how he got this Arthur Trevelyan's clothes—and when they found Soapy dead they must have doped it out his name was Trevelyan."

Gilda's head swam. It had all come so suddenly—so clarifyingly. The mention of her husband's name—the wonderful, the fearful suggestion that Arthur was not dead, or at least, that the grave she had visited was not his—

"Oh, hurry! Please! Go on!"

The nurse looked at her in astonishment at this unbusiness-like outburst and placed a warning finger to her lips. But Gilda was all intent upon what Murphy was saying:

"The bird they pinched must have been Trevelyan, 'cause I run into him in Sing Sing, where he was doin' time. . . . And we made a break from there together, an' come out here—"

Out here! Here, in the same city with her?

"Yes, an' I thought he'd come in good for me, an' so I stuck tight to him—an' I followed him to that house—an' I see now it must ha' been his home—an' when I come in the room to grab that stuff they told about at the trial, he come runnin' in, an' we had a fight, an'—"

Murphy's voice trailed off to nothingness. But he had said enough.

The interne was saying:

"I wouldn't press him any more, Miss Gay," but Gilda did not hear. She was running, breathlessly, through a corridor and out of the county building. There was a taxi at the curb. She breathed an

address and sank back, exhausted, upon the cushions.

Breathlessly, subjected to a thousand interjections and questions, Arthur had told Mark Trevelyan of all that had befallen him since the momentous night in New York City when he had strolled into Central Park. Over and over again, as if to assure himself that his son were really here with him in the flesh, Mark Trevelyan had made sure of details—details which had alike opened the eyes of understanding for Trevelyan, Senior, and Tom Stevens. . . . But Lorraine knew what still impended.

Now Mark Trevelyan puffed fiercely with happiness and overflowing relief.

“Well, I’ll be—well, I’ll—well—what a time you’ve had!” He concluded his summary lamely, and then beamed at Arthur.

“But it’s all right now, anyway. You’re home, and that’s all that matters, isn’t it?”

Something reticent in Arthur’s rejoinder made him wonder.

“Isn’t it all right? Isn’t it?”

Arthur looked at Tom. Tom looked at Lorraine, who steadily returned his gaze. Finally Tom was forced to speak.

“Well, you see—there’s that matter of the unserved Sing Sing sentence—”

“Nonsense! Nothing but red tape!” Mark Trevelyan felt highly contemptuous of prison formalities.

"Unfortunately—" Tom Stevens shook his head. "Unfortunately the extradition papers already have been signed. I'm afraid they must go through."

"What! You mean to say my son must go back and be a—a—a jailbird?"

Tom was silent, assenting.

"But that's ridiculous!" said Mark Trevelyan. "The boy is innocent! Why should he be in prison?"

"The trouble is," said Tom, "that we can't prove him innocent."

"Of course we can! Why, I'll hire every lawyer who ever read Blackstone!"

"You see, he's already been convicted." Tom's point of view was unanswerable. "God knows I'd do anything I could—but it isn't in my hands. New York will have something to say—"

"Bosh! New York's three thousand miles away."

"But it reaches far."

A new thought came to Arthur's father.

"A pardon—couldn't we manage that?"

"Oh, yes, Tom! A pardon! That's the thing! And you have such influence!" Immediately Lorraine had lost all her antagonism to Tom.

"We might—possibly," Tom replied cautiously, "but meanwhile the State must act."

"Tom, you're obstinate!" Lorraine was being vexed at his obtuseness, just when so little would have brought her, melting, into his arms. . . .

"No, Tom is right." Arthur entered the discussion. "What Tom says is true. I've got to go back—I can see that. Then, whatever can be done outside—"

"But oh, Arthur!" Lorraine wailed. "You're not going back to that prison?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to, dear."

"Oh-h-h-h!" Here they were, she saw, up against the same old stone wall. An idea came.

"But you were going back once before, and then I told you about your wife, and your baby, and said you must find them—"

"My Lord!"

Tom's exclamation broke in upon the argument.

"I'd forgotten all about it!"

"Forgotten what?" They turned half curiously, half in dread, to learn what next was to be told.

"About her—she's in my office!"

"In your *office*?"

"Yes—Arthur's wife—I promised her I wouldn't tell—she's working in my office!"

"Oh, no, she isn't!"

Gilda Gay stepped into the room. She had brushed past the maid, attracted by the voices in the library, and now stood before them, glowing, beautiful.

The eyes of the four took in the glorious picture of the woman who came bearing word of such importance that her features shone. But her eyes were only for Arthur. Before he could realize what was happening she ran across the room, gave a little cry of ecstasy and threw herself into his arms. . . .

"H-m-m-m!" mused Mark Trevelyan, when he had recovered from the astonishment of recognizing this young woman whom he had met first amid the debris of a smashed-up milk wagon:

"I think this is a matter in which explanations can wait."

"I think so, too," responded Tom. "Don't you, Lorraine?"

"Well—if you say so. I believe I'll let you decide."

Trust Tom to have attended to the legal formalities which extricated, once and for all, his brother-in-law-to-be from all the enmeshing snarls that had been woven around him. Trust Lorraine to have dispelled forever whatever doubts still lingered of her love for him. Be sure Gilda more than made up to Arthur for all the long years in which they had been separated, and be sure, too, that Eve *did* find a sequel, a happy ending, to the story Tom Stevens had told her when they listened to the organ-grinder. Trust Mark Trevelyan to have carried their first joyous dinner together to a conclusion replete with a sensation of physical and emotional well-being. . . .

Eve Trevelyan was exploring this big house which she was finding out to be her home. She stepped experimentally into the music room.

"Tell me," she heard Tom Stevens saying to Lorraine, "are you sure you can still love me—after everything?"

"Oh, yes!" Lorraine was breathing, "you were a man—often a hateful one, but a *man!*"

This was silly, Eve decided. It was obvious to

her, without Lorraine's words, that Mr. Tom was a man.

Her exploration led her to a corner of the foyer. Here were her muvver and her newly acquired daddy.

"Do you remember, dear?" her daddy was saying, "when we first came in here, and how frightened you were?"

Her mother was giggling a little.

"Yes," Gilda was saying, "and how we stole downstairs, afraid to meet your father? That wonderful father of yours!"

Eve couldn't see any reason why anyone should fear her daddy's father. She decided to determine for herself whether his bristly mustache was dangerous.

Somehow Mark Trevelyan was still feeling lonesome. These young people—they were so interested in themselves and each other. After all, he had been left behind in the race. . . .

"I'm not afraid of you," Eve announced.

Mark Trevelyan thought she was playing a game. He joined in it. He made his mustache bristle out at her, and growled through the whiskers.

"See! I'll show you!"

She climbed up on his lap and recklessly pressed the palm of her hand against the white menace upon his lap. Only a comforting stiffness met her touch. He kissed the petal-like palm tenderly.

"Now tell me a story," she commanded.

"Well," Mark Trevelyan began, "once upon a time there was an old man—"

"Like you?" she interrupted.

"Yes, dear, an old man like me . . . and he had a son. . . ."

The Weaver at the Loom was still. Before him was the tapestry—his finished work. His pattern was complete. Warp and woof, fibre against fibre, color merged with color, the job was done. There were raw materials waiting for another. . . .

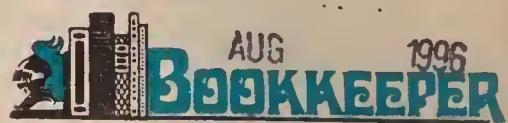
"Not so good," the Weaver mused. "Not *so* bad. But kind of human. We'll look it over when morning comes."

THE END





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